

Horizon

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

WELSH SKETCH BOOK

by GRAHAM SUTHERLAND

FREEDOM FROM WANT

by VISCOUNT ESHER

A SHORT CHARACTER OF SIR EDMUND GOSSE

by OSBERT SITWELL

VULGARITY AND IMPOTENCE

by HERBERT READ

NOTES ON FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA—III

by ARTURO BAREA

POEMS *by* DIANA WITHERBY AND W. J. TURNER

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APRIL VOL. V, No. 28 1942

Edited by Cyril Connolly

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HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. V No. 28 April 1942

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ABOUT THIS NUMBER

COMMENT is again held over owing to pressure of space, and this month Mr. Herbert Read's article must be considered to replace it. There will be a long

COMMENT in the next number

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DIANA WITHERBY

CHILDHOOD AND AGE

The spiky children pour through resined schools,
Some to move out among the river pools
And swimming in this olive summer, scud,
Like jerking water-flies across the mud.
Others, with parks for natural earth, must pass
Through corky patches in the dried-up grass,
Where bark, like wrinkled fruit-stone, grips the dust,
And blistered chairs are furred by ginger rust.

Their winter is remote. A heavy haze
Curtains away the cold yard's dirty maize,
The frozen bird with wings as stiff as horn,
Whose tendril claw now roots among the corn.
Nor, under tarry sun, do they recall
The spinning chimney-pot of whistling squall.
The adult and the even-blooded know
In childhood, as in fever, time is slow.

They see below, with movements like a wild
Needle of pine, the pricking tumbling child.
Despite his rapid legs which vault and speed,
The stationary windmill is not freed,
Standing inside his head; the years are long,
Their sails are almost motionless among
The springing, stroking winds. But age has found
How seasons race, when bones are dull and bound.

On shadowed mantelpiece of mind the cool hours tick
Fast for the old, this amber afternoon. How quick
For them the change from greenening silken dusk to night,
And night to day. But how fatigued and slow the fight
With their own limbs as dry as wicker, which, though rain
Falls on the summer turf, cannot be fresh again.

W. J. TURNER

THE BELOVED

Many, many are in detail beautiful
Yes, full of beauty, commendable,
My eyes commend them, they are dutiful
My eyes, and by long-looking dependable,
Finding in the many the melody
The motif of the whole, the sculptural.

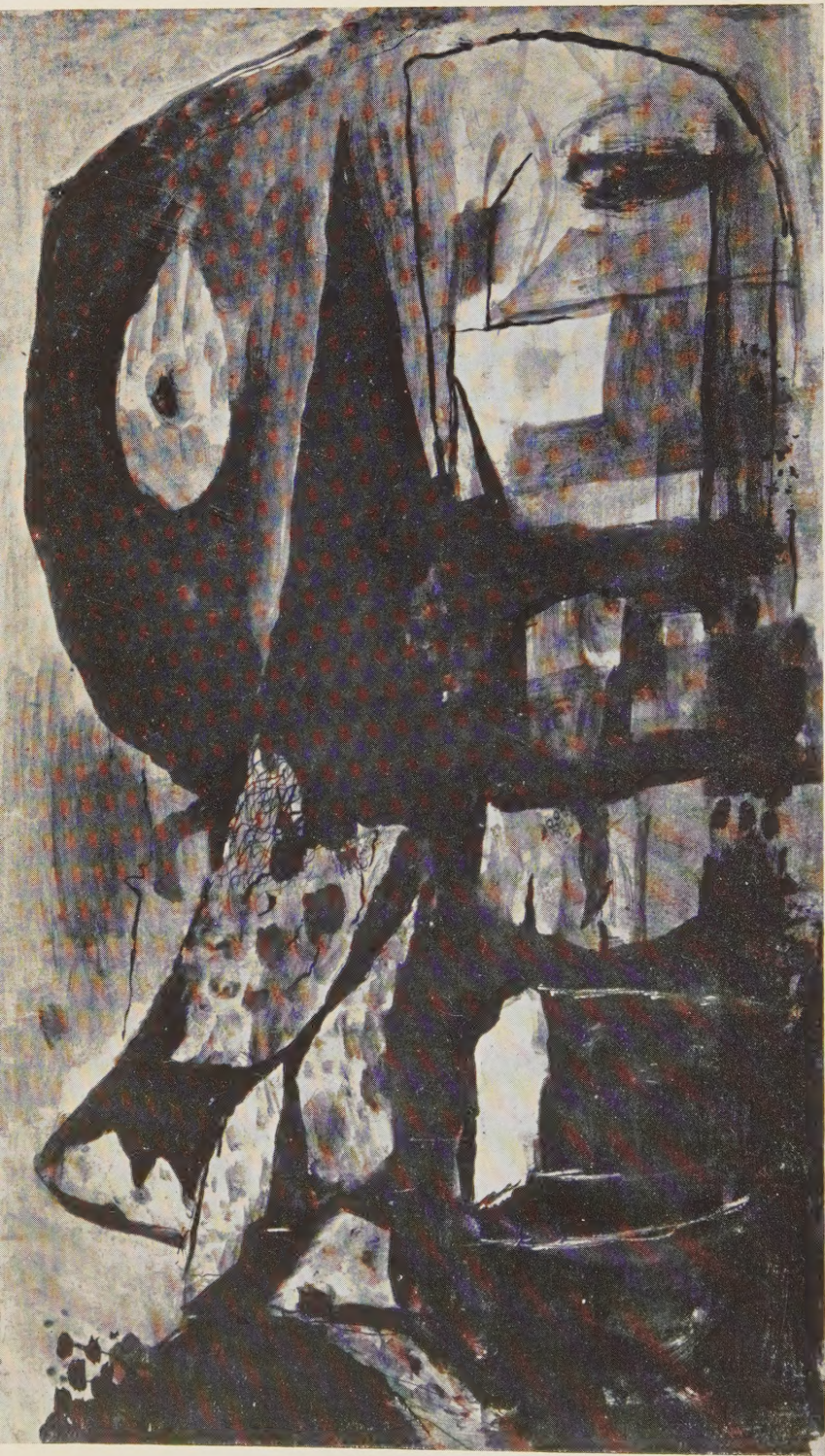
Irregular in every particular
Is *She*, else but beauty-in-marble
Unseducing. O sea-vanishing pebble,
Where are the waters that flowed away from you,
Taking all away from you—found
Completed, all-annihilating, round:

In whom the beginning is the end:
The wave frost-hung in its leap to the moon
A cold curl. Closed eyelids asleep
On her countenance, marmoreal
Her sea-arms long-folded. In her spell
Hitherwards, thitherwards, let no billow fall!

Lest a Princess in life's day-darkened tomb
Awake and her eyelids be opening
To its stillness, fluttering
Like a Spring butterfly in a room
Flowerless, with no air wandering
Like a bee—but unloaded, no pollen scattering.

Twittering along outside bushes
Marks there the unfreezing, the twining irregular
Frivolity of the living, insect-voices in the hushes
Scratching Time's surface, the chrysalis,
The idea of the Creator breaking character,
The Sun's orb petalling in a multitude of blushes.

But she that is lying inviolable
Holds the secret, is the *Imago*, winter's summer;
The everlasting beloved, the sea's cavern-pebble
Cool, perpetual and without number;
The meaning of the many and the melody,
The motif of the whole, the sculptural.



GRAHAM SUTHERLAND

WELSH SKETCH BOOK

DEAR COLIN,

You ask about the places which have started me off—which have started ideas for my paintings. Certainly I would rather write to you about such places than about the paintings themselves; for how can a painter explain his paintings? The onlooker may come to like them through familiarity, or he may hate them. It is quite impossible to follow with any exactitude the path taken by the brain in the fixing of images seen by the eye, stored in the mind, and drawn out of the subconscious. But in describing the sort of things that start one off—the country that one likes, perhaps, and its peculiarities, it may be possible to give some kind of hint as to the genesis of the paintings.

The mind of a painter, of course, is a reservoir for *all* kinds of emotions and impressions. He who is over-discriminating becomes narrow in achievement. Yet a singleness of purpose over certain periods of time is necessary. A painter will have certain preoccupations with regard to his subject, and a passion for it.

I expect that you may have noticed that for the last few years I have been preoccupied with a particular aspect of landscape—and not only that, but, for the most part, with a particular area of country.

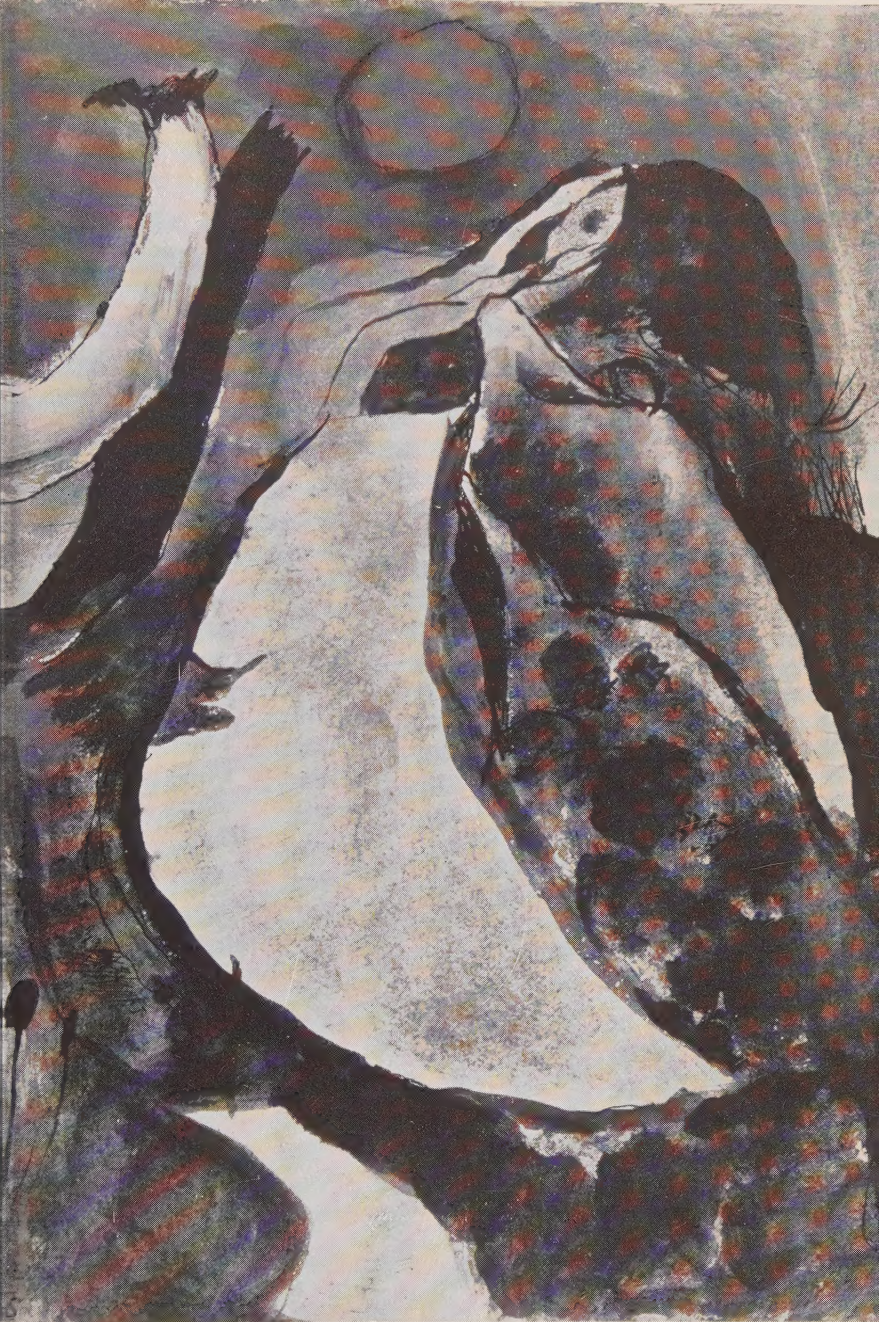
It was in 1934 that I first visited Pembrokeshire. I was visiting a country, a part of which, at least, spoke a foreign tongue, and it certainly seemed very foreign to me, though sufficiently accessible for me to feel that I could claim it as my own.

After a good deal of wandering about, I came upon two very remarkable passages of country situated in the arms of land which embrace the great area of St. Bride's Bay. The arm towards the north is like an isosceles triangle on its side, the narrowest angle forming St. David's Head to the west. One approaches across a wide plain from the north, its emptiness relieved by the interlocking of tightly-packed strips of field and their bounding walls of turf-covered rocks. One soon notices an irregularity of contour on the horizon which resolves itself into what appears to be two mountains. As one approaches still closer one sees that these

masses of rock scarcely attain a height of more than seven hundred feet. But so classically perfect is their form, and so majestic is their command of the smoothly-rising ground below, that the mind comfortably corrects the measurement of the eye, and holds their essential mountainous significance. A rocky path leads round the slopes of the nearer mountain, where, to the west, the escarpment precipitates itself to a rock-strewn strip of marsh, marked out with the crazy calligraphy of the foundations of primitive hut dwellings; from here the ground rises to a vast congregation of rocks, fallen cromlechs, and goats' caves, which continue their undulating and bewildering disorder, until they plunge, in the terraces of St. David's Head, into the table of the sea. The southern slopes yield to the plain again; but here the land, gradually sloping to the sea, is studded with rocky cairns of every size. Between these are fields, each with a spear of rock at its centre. It is as if the solid rock foundation of the earth had thrown up these spears to transfix and hold the scanty earth of the fields upon it. Farms and cottages—glistening white, pink, and blue-grey—give scale and quicken by their implications our apprehension of the scene.

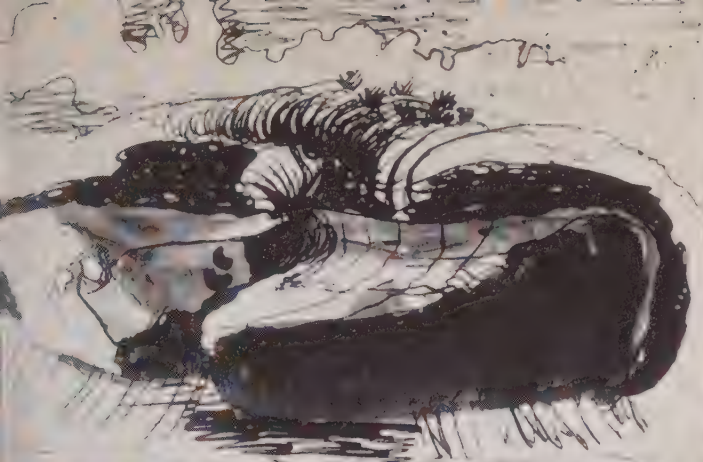
In this direction, nearer the sea, the earth is comparatively flat, but this flatness is deceiving and makes the discovery of little steep valleys more surprising. These valleys possess a bud-like intricacy of form and contain streams, often of indescribable beauty, which run to the sea. The astonishing fertility of these valleys and the complexity of the roads running through them is a delight to the eye. The roads form strong and mysterious arabesques as they rise in terraces, in sight, hidden, turning and splitting as they finally disappear into the sky. To see a solitary human figure descending such a road at the solemn moment of sunset is to realize the enveloping quality of the earth, which can create, as it does here, a mysterious space limit—a womb-like enclosure—which gives the human form an extraordinary focus and significance.

At the risk of talking like a guide-book, I must tell you of the area to the south. I shall never forget my first visit. We approached by a flat winding road and had slipped into one of the little valleys such as I have attempted to describe. To the left this opened out to reveal what appeared to be a watery inlet narrowing to its upper end. As the road progressed we caught further glimpses of this and curiosity was roused. We had intended making for a village called Dale, marked on the map as lying to

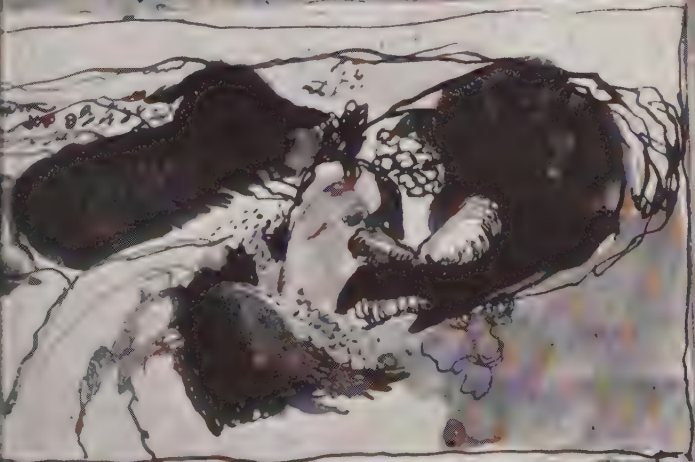


1938. STEEP ROAD. Gouache





1940



the north side of the mouth of Milford Haven. Fortunately, we missed the road and found ourselves descending a green lane buried in trees, which, quite unexpectedly, lead to a little cove and beach by the banks of a narrow estuary.

Here is a hamlet—three cottages and an inn crouch under the low cliffs. A man is burning brushwood cut from a tree, bleached and washed by the sea. The flame looks incandescent in the evening light. The tide in the estuary (or pill, as such inlets are called here) is out, and we walk across the sandy bed of the opening and look down its winding length to the place where it narrows to the upper end.

I wish I could give you some idea of the exultant strangeness of this place—for strange it certainly is, many people whom I know hate it, and I cannot but admit that it possesses an element of disquiet. The left bank as we see it is all dark—an impenetrable damp green gloom of woods which run down to the edge of low blackish moss-covered cliffs—it is all dark, save where the mossy lanes (two each side) which dive down to the opening, admit the sun, hinged, as it were, to the top of the trees, from where its rays, precipitating new colours, turn the red cliffs of the right-hand bank to tones of fire. Do you remember the rocks in Blake's 'Newton' drawing? The form and scale of the rocks here, and the minutiae on them, is very similar.

The whole setting is one of exuberance—of darkness and light—of decay and life. Rarely have I been so conscious of the contrasting of these elements in so small a compass.

The right bank has fields above the cliff, some covered with ripe corn, others with rough gorse-clad pasture. The life-giving sound of the mechanical reaper is heard. Cattle crouch among the dark gorse. The mind wanders from contemplation of the living cattle to their ghosts. It is no uncommon sight to see a horse's skull or horns of cattle lying bleached on the sand. Neither do we feel that the black-green ribs of half-buried wrecks and the phantom tree roots, bleached and washed by the waves, exist but to emphasize the extraordinary completeness of the scene. Complete, too, is the life of the few inhabitants—almost biblical in its sober dignity. The people in this part appear quite incurious of the activities of a foreigner. The immense soft-voiced innkeeper and his wife, small as he is big, sit, when they are not working, bolt upright, on a hard bench in the cool gloom of the parlour which



1959. GREEN TREE FORM. Interior of Wood Coll. Colin Anderson





1939. GORSE ON SEA WALL. Oil

forms the only 'bar' of the inn, or they sit—for he is ferry-man and fisherman, as well as innkeeper—gazing across the ferry.

The quality of light here is magical and transforming—indeed it is in all this country. Watching from the gloom as the sun's rays strike the further bank, one has the sensation of the after-tranquillity of an *explosion* of light; or as if one had looked into the sun and had turned suddenly away.

Hérons gather. They fly majestically towards the sea. Most moving is the sound of snipe which flicker in their lightning dash down the inlet, to and from the sea.

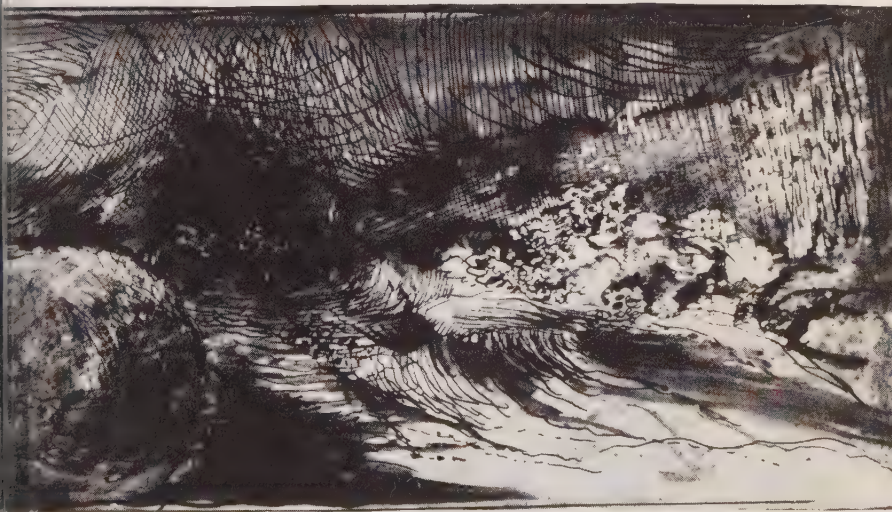
These and other things have delighted me. The twisted gorse on the cliff edge, such as suggested the picture 'Gorse on Sea Wall'—twigs, like snakes, lying on the path, the bare rock, worn, and showing through the path, heath fires, gorse burnt and blackened after fire, a tin school in an exuberant landscape, the high overhanging hedges by the steep roads which pinch the setting sun, mantling clouds against a black sky and the thunder, the flowers and damp hollows, the farmer galloping on his horse down the estuary, the deep green valleys and the rounded hills and the whole structure, simple and complex.

It was in this country that I began to learn painting. It seemed impossible here for me to sit down and make finished paintings 'from nature'. Indeed, there were no 'ready made' subjects to paint. The spaces and concentrations of this clearly constructed land were stuff for storing in the mind. Their essence was intellectual and emotional, if I may say so. I found that I could express what I felt only by paraphrasing what I saw. Moreover such country did not seem to make man appear little as does some country of the grander sort. I felt just as much part of the earth as my features were part of me. I did not feel that my imagination was in conflict with the real, but that reality was a dispersed and disintegrated form of imagination.

At first I attempted to make pictures on the spot. But soon I gave this up. It became my habit to walk through, and soak myself in the country. At times I would make small sketches of ideas on the backs of envelopes and in a small sketch book, or I would make drawings from nature of forms which interested me and which I might otherwise forget. The latter practice helped to nourish my ideas and to keep me on good terms with nature. Sometimes, through sheer laziness, I would lie on the warm shore

until my eye, becoming riveted to some sea-eroded rocks, would notice that they were precisely reproducing, in miniature, the forms of the inland hills. At all events, I never forced myself here, or consciously looked for subjects. I found it better to visit this country because I liked it—and ideas seemed to come gradually and naturally.

I have confined myself to writing about a particular area and do this because it was in this area that I learned that landscape was not necessarily scenic, but that its parts have an individual figurative detachment. I found that this was equally true of other places which I visited later; but the clear, yet intricate construction of the landscape of the earlier experience, coupled with an emotional feeling of being on the brink of some drama, taught me a lesson and had an unmistakable message that has influenced me profoundly. Well, I think there is not much else—it is only a rough outline, but it may go some way towards answering your request.



1941. ESTUARY. Drawing in pen, chalks and wash



1941. PART OF A ROW OF SOLICITORS' OFFICES, SWANSEA

VISCOUNT ESHER

FREEDOM FROM WANT

WISH I understood economics. It would even be a consolation if I could deceive myself with the confident demeanour of 'one who knows', that enviable quality of Treasury officials. I am aware, of course, that I am not isolated in my ignorance. Has not Sir Malcolm Robertson written a weighty report to the Foreign Office, boldly suggesting that it would be useful if Ambassadors had some rudimentary smattering of this occult science? Surely this argues that it can be learnt, that there is a firm foundation of ascertained fact, and that our general impression of conflicting, contradictory professional voices is false. Nevertheless I share with all lay opinion the natural feeling that theories the ordinary intelligent person, namely, oneself, cannot comprehend must have in them an element of nonsense. In spite of these complacencies, however, we all have our pet economists. Mine is Mr. Maynard Keynes. He gives me that 'Arabian Nights' sensation, that romantic belief that he is the genie just issued from the bottle, who can provide me, without effort on my part, with my heart's desire, and put at my disposal the wealth of the world.

These reflections were aroused by a study of that revolutionary document, the Atlantic Charter. Philosophers are dangerous folk. From Moses to Marx they have disturbed the world, dropping inflammable ideas about the place, and leaving the conflagration to the Joshuas and Lenins who come after them. They never have to deal with the dangers and difficulties of the Promised Land. It is easy to assert that all men are born free, if you escape 1789 by dying in 1778. And now the politicians, who should cling cautiously to opportunism and avoid visions at all costs, are taking a hand. It is all very well for impecunious Germans to haunt the British Museum and vent their frustrations upon posterity. But it is indeed surprising for these prosperous and successful statesmen, with their atmosphere of cigars and good-fellowship, to arrive off the coast of Mount Pisgah, and hurl a stick of dynamite at mankind.

Freedom from fear was a large promise. It entails the disappearance of war from the world, and requires the machinery to

give effect to our resolution not to settle disputes by force, not to allow mankind to break the twelfth commandment. But freedom from want is an even larger promise; for it entails the disappearance of poverty, of those poor whom we have always with us and whose hard fate no accepted machinery can eradicate. It is legitimate to wonder how long and careful was the consideration given by two busy and anxious men to those pregnant words. Did they just think how splendid it would be if all men were freed from want?—leaving it to other days and other men to implement their gesture, and build the new order on that golden brick. At any rate, the free of all the earth accepted the challenging gift without a word, as men must accept the truth when, clear and obvious, it is presented to their minds and hearts. Yet now that the bright Seraphim have blown their trumpets, and left us with the theme, it is surely our duty to develop its implications upon the minor instruments of thought, practice, and experience.

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We are accustomed to assume that civilization must be built upon wealth, and, without using the unpleasant word slavery, cheap labour. From Athens, through Rome, Florence, Venice, Holland, to Paris and London, rich cultivated communities have flourished like flowers in the manure of poverty. There are, however, consoling indications that this assumption, so convenient for the rich, need not be elevated into a universal truth. Edinburgh, Dublin, Boston and Stockholm have, at various periods, provided convincing proof that these rich people are not so essential to culture as they would like us to believe. However that may be, it is clear that we shall have to risk it, and if necessary sacrifice some of our not excessively appreciated culture in order to obtain freedom from want. For the first result of a minimum standard of life for the poor is a lower general standard of life for everybody else. It is to be hoped that this is a temporary phenomenon, but both in Russia and in England we have learnt that it must be so. Instantaneously in Russia after its revolution; slowly yet certainly in England, in accordance with the cautious and practical character of its people. The first effect of a transference of wealth is a levelling down, and not as the optimists hoped, a levelling up. If there is to be only one class on the railways it is the first-class that disappears, and everybody goes third

As the minimum standard of life for the poor has been raised by the social services, the burden of taxation from which to create those services has lowered the standard of life for the rich. Under this process the ultimate and perfect expression of English aristocratic culture, the country-house life, has declined, and must disappear. One should not minimize the loss to art and beauty. It is impossible not to feel the sadness of regret for such restrained, unboastful perfection, 'gone with the wind', like its romantic counterpart in Virginia. But there is no reason to fear that it cannot be replaced by simpler, less luxurious forms of cultivated life. All those in contact with the young know that they are not afraid. On the contrary, they feel no regret for the furnished and sumptuous past, of which the cowardice of their conscience has made them ashamed. The old life was built by people unaware of any real responsibility for the poverty beneath them. Religious responsibility assuaged by charity, perhaps, but no personal or political responsibility. The recently awakened social conscience has destroyed the pleasure in unrestricted wealth. The young no longer enjoy the idea of being rich: it makes them uncomfortable and self-conscious. But it will not be an ugly world which they inherit. In the old days only the long purse could demand beauty. Today taste is fast spreading into mass-production. Good materials and artistic design in wood, metal, textiles, and glass are within the reach of the moderate income. Comfort too, which could only be commanded by those in possession of a staff of servants, has, by scientific invention and labour-saving devices, been made attainable by the comparatively humble home. The transition, therefore, to a changed world will come easy to the young, and they will greet the new freedom with a cheer—freedom from want, but also freedom from wealth.

It is not to be anticipated, therefore, that the difficulty of establishing the Atlantic Charter will arise from any obstructive struggle within this ancient and reasonable community. Such class war as there ever was is fought and finished, leaving the bloodless field to the inglorious tax-collector, grimly demanding his nineteen shillings in the pound. It is elsewhere, not in the national, but in the international sphere that the tough problem must emerge. I do not believe that the working-classes of the West have in the least realized that in this sphere they are the rich, and

that it is they whose standard of life must be temporarily lowered if freedom from want is to reach the toiling masses of India, China, and South America. The English working-man, with his cinema, his dog-racing and his football, protected from birth to death by free milk, free education, health insurance, unemployment insurance, old-age pension; and the American working-man, with his high wages, his motor-car and his wireless set, snugly entrenched behind the Hawley-Smoot tariff; are the aristocracy of labour, enjoying a standard of life unknown to the ryot, the coolie, and the peon. Surely the Western working-man cannot expect that this privileged position should be reserved for him alone. Like every other aristocrat, he will have to surrender his class privilege, and allow his standard of living to fall, until such time as his fellow human beings in less fortunate continents have been lifted to a minimum standard of civilized life.

One of the few people who seem to have realized this inevitable implication of the Atlantic Charter is Mr. Hudson, our very able and intelligent Minister for Agriculture. He boldly told the House of Commons that 'our greatest interest must be to see that the great consuming countries who buy our goods are prosperous—and they are primarily agricultural countries. They can be prosperous only if we are willing to pay them a decent price for the food they send us.' In addition to this scarcely veiled suggestion of dear food we have Mr. J. L. Gibson saying, at the Royal Society of Arts, that 'we ought to envisage our materials as coming to us from the whole world, rather than from an enclosed economy as suggested by the concept of economic nationalism, whether that be within this country or within the Empire. It broadens our view if we can determine that the resources of the world, in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, shall become available to mankind as a whole.' No doubt it broadens our view, but it will certainly narrow our income. Mr. F. H. Purchas, criticizing what he calls the new economics of Mr. Hudson, complains that it 'seems impossible that a new order established on the suggestion that we should subsidize our competitors would accomplish anything towards the maintenance of the high standard of living to which we have become accustomed.' The use of the word competitor shows clearly enough that Mr. Purchas has not advanced to the altruisms of the Atlantic Charter and has not grasped that our privileged working-class must subsidize the poor.

foreigner, just as the upper class at home have had to subsidize the poor by means of the social services. And while on the one hand, in agreement with Mr. Hudson, we hand out such subsidies; on the other hand, in agreement with Mr. Gibson, we must be ready to strike down the props of privilege, Ottawa agreements, Hawley-Smoot tariffs, and all the calculated machinery that now keeps Asiatic, African, and South American labour 'in its place' of poverty. Just as the old privileged class could not 'maintain the high standard of living to which it was accustomed', so the rich Western countries must surrender their top-dog position in international life, and be prepared to share whatever wealth there be with those less fortunate than themselves.

For centuries the upper-class did not know that the consolidation and advancement of the family unit, as opposed competitively to the interests of the rest of the nation, was selfish and wrong. So now the working-class does not realize that the consolidation and advancement of the nation, as opposed competitively to the interests of the rest of the world, is also selfish and wrong. And with that verdict must be included the exploitation of imperial property to ensure a reserved use of raw materials. The light of conscience broke in, after long probation, on the upper class. How far has the great light from the Atlantic been seen by the rest of the community? No long probation has served to educate them; on the contrary, they have been presented with an abrupt and unexpected revolution of ideas, asking them, in the full flood of nationalist emotion, to move up on to the international plane. It would not be surprising, therefore, if considerable opposition were to appear.

It is at this stage that a knowledge of economics would be so welcome. The need for a consoling voice, to set a definite and authoritative limit to the miseries of transition, is imperative for those who need a support for their idealism. For it is certain that the demanded sacrifice is not permanent, and that compulsory unselfishness must lead directly to a brave new world. We ask of the economists some hopeful and inspiring words, tiding us over the interregnum, until the increased purchasing power of the poor nations so increases the demand for goods that a new era of prosperity arrives. 'How long?' is naturally the question of those whose standard of living is threatened with reduction. Let us strike boldly in the dark for a minimum—two generations, sixty

years. We could hardly hope to establish a new cultivated life, a new model of international civilization in less. The gentle and painless process of our English revolution has gone its placid and peaceful way since the introduction of Sir William Harcourt's death duties in 1894. Nearly fifty years later it is not complete, the place once filled by the rich is empty. The violent process of the Russian revolution destroyed the old life in a few bloody months, but the recovery was not hastened by the method. Nearly twenty-five years have elapsed, and the place filled by the rich is emptier than it is in England. Beauty, elegance and art have not yet been replaced, though in both countries there are signs of renaissance. It cannot be expected that the explosion of the Atlantic Charter will cool and harden into happy forms of civilized international life in any less period of time.

Meanwhile we move on into this new international equalitarian world. There, it is to be hoped, we shall hear no more of those unpleasant human failings, hatred of foreigners and envy of the rich. They form too evidently the basis of national war and class war, the aggression of Germany, the degradation of France. Race arrogance has made Germany a hideous example, as love of money and fear of Communism have made France a piteous example, of the decadence of the old world. But it would be foolish to imagine that any economic or political change is going to eradicate envy and hatred from the human heart. They will change their form, alter their objective. If there are no rich, envy of ability may take its place. It is said to have already done so in democratic Australia, and there is great reluctance to allow anyone abler or cleverer than his fellows to emerge above the common level of uninspired competence. If there are no foreigners, our hatred may be transferred to the vast international bureaucracy, whose forms, orders and restrictions will burden our regulated and planned existence. Other disadvantages such as a dismal uniformity may appear.

But sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, and the rich nations of the West should not allow any cowardly anticipation of human fallibility to deter them from the sacrifices necessary to achieve and secure freedom from want. On the contrary, we can be confident that here, at any rate, the English people, so adorned with eccentricity and individual character, will bring variety and colour to the unknown future as they have to the recorded past.

OSBERT SITWELL

A SHORT CHARACTER OF SIR EDMUND GOSSE

This character is one of a series that composes Volume IV of Mr. Osbert Sitwell's Autobiography. This volume is designed as a set of independent pictures.)

IT is easy for the young critics of the present day to mock at the late Sir Edmund Gosse, but they would not find it so easy were he alive: he would see to that. The last survivor of an age that had passed, he constituted the lingering, final spark of the pre-Raphaelite comet that had flashed through the darkness of the Victorian night, and it is for this reason that I set myself to the task of trying to present a momentary glimpse of his personality.

Of his literary work I shall say little, except that to all who have read it, it must be plain that *Father and Son* is a remarkable book, and one that soars on a sudden flight of wings high above the level that he generally achieved. It was a book ahead of the time, to the same degree that its author was sometimes behind it. (Shaw, indeed, proclaimed that it entitled its writer to burial in the Abbey.) But his poetry is of a kind that does not appeal to me, and I detest conventional literary criticism. Nevertheless, for it has been so much disparaged, I must briefly enter various pleas on his behalf in this respect.

Gosse's understanding of dead authors is perhaps more sure than his comprehension of living; when, for example, he wrote of the minor Elizabethan dramatists, he was impeccable in feeling, if not always, it appears, in fact. His knowledge, along its own lines, was wide and deep. Above all, his opinions were prejudiced—as like an author's to be.

I first met Gosse in 1916, at a luncheon party given in his honour by the late Robert Ross. In appearance he was rather small, neatly built. In spite of his, at first, somewhat ordinary appearance, he manifested, all the same, when you came to examine him, a certain panache all the more effective because it was not too obtrusive.

Above the Puritan foundations, Victorian and solid, which were at once evident, could be detected also an air of gaiety and dash, most attractive, and seldom to be met with in one of his age, for he was nearing seventy. He was fine in profile, in the texture of his fair skin, of his grey hair that had been yellow, and of his slightly drooping Chinoiserie moustache; *refined* in the proper sense of the word. Indeed, his name itself, *Gosse*, if you came to think of it, suggested something of him, something of this sprightly, elusive *gossamer* quality. But this mild and frail exterior offered as well certain indications of strength, albeit of the coiled spring, rather than dumb-bell, variety. Moreover, he could make it menacing, for it disguised a true fighting spirit, a nature perhaps a little feline, but most certainly daring and even aggressive—and it must not be forgotten that tigers and leopards and lions also belong to the cat tribe. In *Gosse's* anger—and, when displeased he liked, I think, the world to know it—you could watch the cat pounce, the tiger spring, the lion both play and roar. He gave no quarter and implored none. He brooked no rivals. . . . Yet all this that I have described as *panache* was, notwithstanding, ever subtly tintured with the atmosphere of an English Sunday.

Even more important than this fine but pernicky distinction, however, was the impalpable aura of power that emanated from him. Young writers were not introduced to him, they were brought up to be presented, and, beforehand, they would feel nervous—if they did not, he could be trusted to see that they felt nervous afterwards. The distinction, then, was innate; the aura owed its glow to several component causes. There was his friendship with the pre-Raphaelites, and with other great and interesting men; there was his introduction of Ibsen to the English-speaking world; there was his eminence as a critic, and there was, finally, his learning. In the past his accuracy had often been impugned, his authority challenged, but these times were long over—even that happy, never-to-be-forgotten afternoon, when, still smarting from the mortal attack made upon him in the *Quarterly* a day or two earlier by Churton Collins—one whom he had considered his friend—he had arrived, in fulfilment of a promise made long before, to stay at Aldworth with Lord Tennyson. Tennyson was older than himself and in the full blaze of his great fame, and involuntarily *Gosse* trembled before the ordeal. It was

tea-time when he had arrived, and he found the poet at the head of a long table crowded with guests, and at the other end a place empty. He said 'How do you do?' and sat down. The poet surveyed him, and then called down the table between the ranks of attentive ears:

'Gosse, shall I tell you what *I* think of Churton Collins?'

Gosse could not refuse the challenge, and had apprehensively assented, whereupon he heard the great man roll at him the following alliterative and assuaging sentence:

'He is a Louse on the Locks of Literature.'

But now Churton Collins was dead—he had committed suicide—Tennyson, too, was dead, and as a consequence, in one way and another, Gosse's aura had grown brighter. Attacks on his learning had ceased, and his successors knew little of how intensely he had suffered. His stature, as it were, had increased by itself, year by year, until now he was a prince of professors. The lights that had, in their lifetimes, dimmed the lustre of his smaller flame, had gone out, and his, as a result, seemed brighter. Honours had poured in upon him and continued to do so: C.B. and knighthood, honorary degrees from St. Andrews and Cambridge, Strasbourg and Gothenburg and the Sorbonne, the orders of St. Olaf in Norway, the Polar Star in Sweden, and of the Danish Dannebrog; honours awarded to his own merits, as much as, by proxy, to the dead poets and painters of originality, whose gifts he had been one of the few to appreciate in their own time, but who had themselves received little from their country or from their rulers except abuse and mockery. But though Gosse loved the world and loved honours, he still rated above all the arts and literature. Now like a king he could surround himself with favourites, his chosen heirs, young men and women of promise. At a good word from him—and at this time from him alone—the sales of an author's books, even of a poet's, mounted higher, while the insolence he would naturally otherwise have to encounter would diminish or altogether disappear.

The younger poets, in whose work he took an interest, were well exemplified in a reading, organized on behalf of some charity by the late Robert Ross and Madame Vandervelde, in the autumn of 1917. It was held at the house of a Mrs. Colefax in South Kensington—Onslow Square, if I am not mistaken. Gosse was in the chair, and the poets who were invited to read their own poetry

were, so far as I can remember, Robert Graves, Robert Nichols, Siegfried Sassoon, Irene Rutherford McLeod, Sherard Vines, T. S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Edith Sitwell, Sacheverell Sitwell, and myself. Sassoon failed to materialize, but the others were there. It was on this occasion that I first realized how nervous Gosse was, for, though an excellent chairman, he would glance with plain exasperation if anything went wrong, and he took such umbrage at Eliot—who had been detained at his office—arriving twenty minutes late on the platform, that I doubt he ever forgave him. Fortunately he was easily distracted temporarily. He loved all little ceremonies and gracious formalities, and so was for the moment easily mollified when Robert Nichols, as planned, stepped forward and proceeded to recite a poem of Gosse's—I forget the title, but it contained the line

‘The centaur crashes through the undergrowth.’

His poetic favourites at the time of which I write were undoubtedly Mr. Robert Nichols, Mr. Robert Graves and Mr. Siegfried Sassoon. To the work of the first of these I have heard Gosse give unstinted praise, in which were mingled the names of Keats¹ and Shelley. With Sassoon, the friendship was very genuine and of long standing, because in addition to Gosse's enthusiastic liking of much of his poetry, the elder man had been a great and lifelong friend of Sassoon's uncle, Sir Hamo Thornycroft. . . . But there were also those of whom he disapproved, who must not, indeed, be mentioned in his presence, without a momentary displacing of the aura and an interference with its regular radiations. Of these, the ringleader was Ezra Pound, ‘that preposterous American filibuster and Provençal charlatan,’ as I once heard Gosse refer to him. At the same time he was courteous, and his standard of politeness was old-fashioned and very strict. Above all, no one must speak slightly of his friends in his presence or render anything but the respect which eminence demands to the eminent. He was, in fact, a disciplinarian, and one of the last who

¹ He saw a resemblance, physically as well as in their poetic gifts. ‘Robert Nichols is a very remarkable young man, with a face that in profile has a striking resemblance to that of Keats as Severn recalled it some years after Keats's death. He is distractingly violent, mercurial and excessive, but most attractive in his flaming zeal and pale vehemence.’ Extract from a letter to Dr. Sim, dated March 20, 1918, from Sir Edmund Gosse. *Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*. (Evan Charteris, K.C. William Heinemann Ltd., London, 1931.)

ould 'administer a rebuke'. For so cautious a man, he was sometimes curiously unafraid of committing himself: in a long letter to Sir Edward Marsh, who, because Gosse had expressed his liking of E. M. Forster's earlier books, had sent him *Howard's End*, he descended in most injudicious thunder upon that delightful novel. Let me quote one passage:

'I hope you will not be vexed with me for speaking so plainly, because I know that you have influence with the author of this unhappy book . . . I cannot help hoping that you may be induced to say something which will redeem him from the slough of affectation and false sentiment into which he has fallen.

'If I were asked to point to a passage which combined all that prose fiction should not be—lurid sentimentality, preposterous morals, turgid and sickly style—I do not think I could point to anything worse than the closing chapters of *Howard's End*.'¹

In the company of the young poets I have mentioned earlier his manner at times relaxed, for though his attitude in general was of an unrelenting vigilance, a willingness to fly to arms at the first sign of battle, he felt sure of their talent and of their friendship. Indeed, the combativeness of his nature seemed to make his amiability all the more amiable, in the same way that it rendered his very occasional compliments, steeped in vinegar though they always were, seem more memorable than those of others. Thus I always look back with pleasure to a certain Sunday afternoon. When I had first met Gosse at luncheon, he had commanded me to go to tea with him the following Sunday—not any Sunday—when he and Mrs. Gosse were always at home. Gradually we used often to be present at these gatherings. One Sunday in autumn, my sister, my brother and myself were just leaving his house. We were undefeated, but thoroughly mauled, and glad to go home and lick our wounds. Gosse, with his usual beautiful manners, saw us down to the door himself, and then called after us into the blue dusk: 'Good-bye, you delightful but pleterious trio.'

As for the reasons why so many people submitted to the claims implicit in his general ambience, it was because his conversation was delightful, spiced with its own particular quality, and because

¹ Quoted from *The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*. (Evan Charteris, K.C. William Heinemann, Ltd., London, 1931.)

of the comparative respect in which great men were still held. Debunking, that most decadent and degrading of literary arts, had barely begun. The giants of the Victorian Age were esteemed while at the same time a new curiosity had begun to manifest itself concerning them. As the years went by, this man who had known Swinburne so intimately, who had constituted himself his apostle and prophet, came to possess a special interest. After Swinburne's death, he was the repository of all his secrets. And in this connection I may say that I think his dislike of Watts Dunton was not due to any sense of rivalry, in him so strong, but to his conviction that Watts Dunton had harmed Swinburne, as well as deprived English poetry of further glories. I think Gosse knew more about Swinburne and his temperament than any man living—there are hints of it in Sir Evan Charteris's *Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*. And undoubtedly what he found out after Swinburne's death, from the poet's letters, came as a tremendous shock to him. But what does he mean exactly when he refers in a letter to Swinburne's fear of Watts Dunton? It must mean something, but he never explains it. . . . He told me that he was sure the whole world would come round to his view of the way in which Watts Dunton had behaved. When I asked him what would effect the change, he replied that he thought when it transpired that they had made identical wills, each leaving everything to the other, but that Swinburne at the time was possessed of money and Watts Dunton of nothing, this would produce great alteration in the public mind.

To revert, however to his status, there had been other friends besides Swinburne; he had, as we have seen, known Tennyson and, more intimately, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and William Morris, as well as many lesser followers of theirs, such as the fantastic character, Theophile Marzials, the poet (and a descendant of the interesting Venetian painter Marziale, contemporary of Titian's). He had known Browning, too, and had been one of Stevenson's discoverers and greatest friends. Henry James, moribund when I met Gosse, had visited him often and there was Thomas Hardy, who, though still very much alive, ranked by his greatness as long dead.

How far Gosse was conscious of this special association interesting attaching to him as the sole representative of many great men now dead, and therefore esteemed by the world, I am not aware; but

should hazard, to the fullest extent, for he himself possessed the keenest possible interest in links with the past. He was fond, for example, of recalling how he had known Gainsborough at only four removes. . . . I forget the exact articulation of the chain, but I think it was that Gainsborough's housemaid had gone, after his death, as housekeeper, into the service of a family with whom his parents were acquainted. Similarly, I remember his interest when I told him that while I was descended from Arabella Churchill, being of the ninth generation, I could span the two and a-half centuries in four removes, for one of my grandmothers as a young girl had known Miss Mary Berry very well, and Miss Berry had been a great friend of Horace Walpole's, and he, as a small boy, had seen a funny old lady come into Downing Street, and asked his father who she was, and had been told that it was Mrs. Godfrey, the former Arabella Churchill. All such ramifications and traditions enchanted him.

Only through him, then, was it still possible for younger men to catch a glimpse of the Victorian giants, while—which made his anecdotes extremely fascinating—in *his* voice, as he related what they had said, you could for the moment catch the very echo of *their* voices speaking. And his sense of the ludicrous—and that, I think, is what he possessed more than humour or wit—played even round such semi-sacred subjects as Swinburne or Rossetti, though it never led to the listener belittling them in his mind. Their greatness was implicit.

Let me relate three of such stories that Gosse told me.

His voice, as I have said, mirrored those of whom he talked. When he read poems, of his own or others, his diction was invariably that of Swinburne, upon whom, consciously, or unconsciously through love and enthusiasm, he had modelled it. It can be imagined, then, that his deliberate imitations were excellent, and he often told me a story (which appears in Charlier's book) relating to Swinburne in which, as he talked, you could almost see the poet, as well as hear his tones.

Swinburne had been offended by some remarks that Emerson was alleged to have made to a journalist about *Poems and Ballads*, a book which Swinburne had sent him just after it was published. Swinburne wrote to him asking if it were true that he had said these things, but no answer reached him. One day Gosse and Swinburne were sitting in the Green Park, talking, and

it transpired that Swinburne had written Emerson a second letter. Knowing the poet's fiery temperament, Gosse was anxious.

'I hope you said nothing rash?'

'No, no.'

'But what did you say?'

'I kept my temper, I preserved my equanimity.'

'What exactly were the words you used?'

At this, Swinburne swung, chanting as it were, into the chorus with an obvious relish.

'I merely said, "You are a wrinkled and toothless baboon, who first hoisted into notoriety on the shoulders of Carlyle, now spits and splutters on a filthier platform of your own finding and fouling."'

The second story concerns Dante Gabriel Rossetti (whose brother was considered by the elect to be the least gifted—to put it at its highest—of his family) and William Morris.

Morris had sent D. G. Rossetti a copy of the *Sigurd the Volsung* when it appeared. As time went by, and no letter of thanks or appreciation arrived from him, Morris grew more and more annoyed. Eventually, one morning, he charged—he was a very burly man—into Rossetti's studio and at once broached the subject with a typical directness.

'Evidently,' he boomed at his friend, who was painting, 'you do not like my book, or you would have written to me about it.'

'To tell you the truth, Topsy,' the other confessed with nonchalance, 'I must own that I find it difficult to take much interest in a man whose father was a dragon.'

Morris at once brought the conversation down to a more human level by roaring out 'I don't see it's any odder than having a brother who's an idiot,' and rushed out of the room.

The other story concerns this brother, in the 'seventies, when the words 'Italian anarchists' bore for the British bourgeois mind the same significance as 'Russian Bolsheviks' carried fifty years later. Bombs were their medium, and hardly a day passed, it seemed, on the Continent without an explosive removal of some popular monarch or grand-duke, or the mysterious and pointless blowing-up of a crowded arcade. Moreover, at the particular moment to which this story refers, some of these miscreants, still

wearing their ideological livery of flowing black cloak and sombrero, were said to have found a refuge in England, and to be planning an outrage in London.

One winter evening, then, Gosse boarded a crowded omnibus outside that notorious haunt of foreigners, the Café Royal. The horses went staggering on through the clear yellow fog of those days, through the yellow snow of the great city, that fell in large flakes past the yellow plaster of Nash's dingy but graceful façades. On an evening such as this people preferred to be inside the creaking, jolting vehicle to riding on top; they dreaded, even, the moment of leaving its shelter when they arrived at their destination. In consequence, it was so crowded that Gosse had to stand. As he looked about him, he saw W. M. Rossetti, whom he knew well, attired in the huge black cloak and the large black hat which he always affected, sitting, a little way off, with his daughter. Remembering that a paragraph had lately appeared in the papers stating that Rossetti had turned atheist, Gosse, with the adroit directness which he adopted instead of the feline, indirect approach natural to him, bent across one or two passengers and called:

'Mr. Rossetti! Mr. Rossetti! Is it true that you have become an atheist?'

In a slow, pompous, very clear voice that rolled out each word loud above the reverberations of the traffic, Rossetti replied:

'No, Mr. Gosse, I must differentiate. My daughter, here, is an atheist; I am an ANARCHIST!'

At this moment, the bus stopped, and the occupants of the seats, panic-stricken by the conjunction of his cloak, Italian name and self-confessed creed of destruction, dashed for shelter, and Gosse was able to travel home in comfort.

His home was then in Delamere Terrace, but when I first met him he was living in Hanover Terrace, to which he had moved in 1901. For several decades his tea parties on Sunday afternoons in these two houses had constituted a feature of London literary life. This second house, No. 16, was situated in a typical Nash layout, and the front doors of all the houses in the terrace were placed in the shelter of a plaster colonnade with Doric pillars. To this you mounted by flights of steps that served every three or four front doors, so that you were obliged to walk for a little under the colonnade, while often the mingled pleasure and trepidation that you felt at the thought of the hour or so in front of you—for the

visit would be certain to prove both treat and ordeal—caused you to mount an earlier flight and wander along in its shade, pretending to yourself that you were not sure which was the house, or, at least, even if you ascended the right steps, to linger a little and admire from this higher level the framed and ordered arrangement of domes and cupolas and arcades showing above the trees, or the nearer perspective of rich plaster volutes, vases, statues, the clustered columns and caryatids. When practice had made you skilful, it was possible to while away many minutes in this kind of preoccupied concentration before you were finally committed to the correct door. Even then there was the knocker to contemplate before you raised it. This, I should judge, recalling it after fifteen years, was fashioned of copper or bronze by one of the pre-Raphaelite artificers, and represented either a mermaid wilting into a kind of prophecy of *L'Art Nouveau*, or else a young lady entangled with a dolphin—I cannot be sure which. At last you knocked, and with a scrupulous promptitude Parker—the celebrated parlour-maid of whom I shall have more to say in a moment—opened the door, and you heard it shut behind you.

Parker showed you upstairs to the drawing-room. Outside it were various personal relics, things that had belonged to Swinburne, Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and Stevenson, or were presents from them, but though often the visitor longed to examine them, he was never given time, for Parker had opened the door and proclaimed—proclaimed is the right word—your presence. The drawing-room lay before you. It was not, perhaps, exactly pretty, for it was too crowded, but it had a sort of glint about it, a threading of gold from picture frames and furniture and objects, and offered a charming air of detailed late-Victorian domesticity. Moreover it faced the park, and, as you entered, you obtained a lovely vista, green and watery, of pool and weeping willows and stretches of grass, and distant depths of shadow between the taller, further trees. The tea-table stood, as a rule, between the windows, and Mrs. Gosse sat with her back to them, between them, with a glistening silver tea-equipment in front of her. Gosse would be sitting facing the window, glaring back at the light with his blue eyes, or looking down from time to time, as he stroked with a rhythmic motion his black and white cat, Buchanan. (Buchanan was an important member of the household, and had adopted Gosse a year or two before. Though a

common, he was a proud cat, and would never consent to come up to tea unless called or carried by his master in person. Moreover, to secure his continued attendance, he had to be bribed with a saucer of milk, first poured out by Mrs. Gosse, and then served to him by her in a kneeling position.) Behind Gosse, in the other part of the room—which he used also as a study—stood, rank on rank, the tall bookcases of his remarkable library.

Mrs. Gosse, a most kind, charming and courteous woman, understood perfectly her husband's character, comprehended his very nature, his nervous irritability, no doubt aggravated by half a century's hard work and also by the many vexations and jealousies inseparable from a literary career—incidents exemplified at their worst by the Churton Collins episode. She tried to pad the corners for him, so that neither he nor others should be hurt. Even her voice carried a suggestion of kindness and humour, and her tones seemed further calculated to assure the visitor that she was in full control, knew her job, and would rescue him in time, should the little tiger spring too eagerly, too fiercely. She found great amusement in the ludicrous and inconsequent side of life, and I remember the pleasure with which she told me of her husband's recent correspondence with a neighbour, who owned a noisy parrot. This bird was continually disturbing Gosse when he was at work, so finally he sent round a note to the lady, asking her to check the garrulity of her pet. He was dumbfounded by her reply, for she wrote saying that she had always understood that he was 'an eminent literary gentleman', and was surprised that he should pay attention to what a poor parrot said.

Mrs. Gosse exercised her influence over her husband in the quietest way possible, and I am sure can never have quarrelled with him, or said more than a remonstrative 'Edmund! Edmund!' Indeed I recall one afternoon during the last war, when Gosse had been dancing with more than his accustomed sprightliness on the knees of all those present, that one of the guests, a woman of massive frame and intellect, suddenly—and without any connection with what was being said, for her mind was running entirely on the current food shortage—threw a boulder into this gyrantic display, by inquiring in the most serious tone:

"Nellie, do you ever give Edmund *beans*?"

A sympathetic sparkle came into Mrs. Gosse's eyes, but she answered:

'Never, my dear; I have never even tried to give him beans.'
And I am sure she spoke the truth.

She saw his weaknesses, notwithstanding, no less keenly than she appraised his virtues. Yet rarely, very rarely, did she allow a remark to escape her that showed it. During tea, however, on Sunday afternoon in autumn, I happened to be present when Gosse complained of a cold. He was still, I think, Librarian of the House of Lords—a position to which he had been appointed in 1904—or at any rate had been there again, for he remarked: 'I must have caught it in those draughty corridors of the House of Lords'; whereupon Lady Gosse observed, in her gentle, almost unctuous voice:

'Edmund is so fortunate. He always catches *his* colds in the draughty corridors of the House of Lords, whereas I and my daughters catch ours on the tops of omnibuses or in tube stations.'

Yet, though Gosse, Mrs. Gosse, their daughters, Miss Sylvia—that admirable artist—and Miss Tessa, each of them possessed enough personality to furnish a whole house, and all did in fact make their own contributions to the atmosphere, it was Parker who set the tone. And so it is essential to try, if one wishes to convey to the reader something of the feeling of this establishment, to say a little of her too, because her tactful, determined, benign and yet rather disembodied influence was omnipresent throughout its precincts. Her sense, I should say, in all social matters was infallible. Though, I think, she probably entered with enthusiasm into all Gosse's likes and dislikes (she had plainly studied his feelings for many years), she never showed her own by the flick of an apron-string. Tall, thin, unobtrusive, she carried the art of being impersonal beyond the range of impersonality until it became individual again. She was, indeed, a parlour-maid of genius.

She found the highest medium of her art as herald. When she announced the names of guests at tea, she seemed to be both hieratic and the djin of the tea-caddy. Her voice, formal and precise as the ritual voice of an Emperor of China in former times, was yet significant to the highest degree. Perfect in elocution, her plain and unemotional tones were calculated to convey with the greatest accuracy and the strictest economy of means, even to the casual stranger—a bibliophile, let us say, fresh from the open spaces of Boston or Greenwich Village, and strange as would be

a Martian visitor to this enclosed world—the exact degree to which the latest arrival in the drawing-room was famous or unknown, the real extent of his talent or of his prestige, as well as the prevalent opinion, both within Hanover Terrace and outside it, of his brains, his character, and his productions.

Thus with each word that fell from her, she helped to chart unknown social seas. If, then, it would be an exaggeration to call her voice musical, as it would be equally, perhaps, so to describe the voice of a great Flamenço singer, it possessed a similar technical perfection, being to the highest degree expressive.

‘The Marquis of Carabas!’

For instance, bore with it, for all the apparent dryness of style, a conviction of long and noble descent, vistas of pleached alleys, and peacocks and gazebos, and was quite different from

‘Lord Haldane!’

the sound of which carried, from her mouth, a ponderous and stately thunder all its own, whole volumes of philosophy and scientific reading, many councils of state and elucidations of pure reason (looking back, it seems to me that her tones prophesied, even, that he would be uncle to a future Communist stalwart, Mrs. Mitchison, and to the scientific professor).

‘Mr. Siegfried Sassoon!’

brought with it the sound of a poet kicking in vain against a horse box, together with a suggestion of irregular political opinions.

‘Mr. Robert Nichols!’

the most delicate lyricism, and hopes like the tender green of young leaves, while my own name swung into the sedate Sunday afternoon sunlight of that Victorian drawing-room like a young bull entering an arena—or, perhaps, a china shop. . . . But Parker was always kind to me—and so, often, was my host.

Typical as Gosse could be at his tea-parties, it was at his dinner-parties that he was at his best. But, here, again, though Lady Gosse and her daughters were responsible for so much of the charm of these occasions, it was Parker who set the tone, formal or festive; you could tell as you arrived. The menus were lengthy, the food, solid and well-cooked, without any taint of aristocratic hummery, for in this direction Gosse allowed no nonsense to obscure his middle-class origin or way of living. For example, he

always carved the chief dish—a goose or turkey—himself. The atmosphere of these entertainments was unlike anything to be found elsewhere in the gay but dishevelled 'twenties. There would be ten or twelve people, and the number would be sure to include, besides the essential leaven of a title or two, George Moore or Robert Ross, perhaps Max and Mrs. Beerbohm, if they were in London, or Logan Pearsall Smith, and a few younger writers, but, above all, such persons as I have named, who understood Gosse, and with whom he could play his own inimitable games in his own manner (and the rules prevailing at these differed from the ones governing the tea-parties, or so it always seemed to me). They must be men who would observe and score up each point and counterpoint, each scratch and paw and pat and compliment and rebuff. . . . And, before I leave the subject of these dinner-parties, I must relate how, the first time I went to dine at Hanover Terrace, I heard Parker make the strangest announcement that, I think, can ever have fallen from her lips. There was an air-raid in progress when I arrived, the first big air-raid—or so it seemed—of the war. We waited in the drawing-room for my sister, who was late, to the sound of falling bombs and of mortars. Suddenly Parker entered and announced crisply:

'Miss Sitwell has telephoned. She sends her compliments, but says she refuses to be an Aunt Sally for the Germans, so she is not coming to dinner.'

The Gosses were enchanted with this message, which shows that his formality of manners yet allowed him to make exceptions. He was a charming host; yet as a guest, or rather as a prospective guest, he was intimidating, and to the young especially. For him, one had to make every preparation, take every precaution, and the nervousness that was engendered, in the end made one do the wrong thing. At the same time, when the rather dreaded moment came, and the door opened, he appeared always to be in an intensely amiable mood, eager to be entertained, even surprised, and inclined to give quarter, for he really liked the society of young people, and was anxious to know how they lived and in what directions they differed from his own contemporaries at the same age. . . . But this was, as a rule, exactly what the young, if they were his hosts, were, consciously and sub-consciously, determined to prevent him from finding out.

On several occasions he dined with my brother and myself, and

I notice in a letter, published in the *Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse*, a reference to his having dined with me one night, towards the end of the last war, when I was Captain of the King's Guard at St. James's Palace. I remember little of it, though it may have been on the same evening that Sickert came, and so much startled my junior officers by remarking, in a pause during an argument, 'Well, nobody could be more typically English than I am—born in Munich of pure Danish blood, in 1860.' . . . I do, however, recall very clearly the first time Gosse came to dine with my brother and myself in the house we then had in Swan Walk, and of which Sickert—to quote him again—insisted that the atmosphere was summed up in Gray's famous line,

'Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm.'

There was, indeed, a good deal for us to fear beforehand, when one came to think of this night drawing nearer and nearer; for, if the Victorian and Edwardian ages were dead anywhere in London their corpses were buried in this particular house. Gosse disapproved of all of the art of the day, except the semi-academic, and the walls were crowded with pictures by modern artists, Lewis, Roberts, Paul and John Nash, Nevinson, Gertler, Fry, Nina Hamnett, Modigliani, and Severini, and drawings by Gaudier Brjeska, Picasso, Modigliani, and Sickert. Nor were the decorations by any means pre-Raphaelite, for they included various masks and fetishes from Dahomey and Ashanti and the South Seas, mingled with Victorian objects displayed for qualities other than those which the Victorians themselves admired.

When the evening came, it was a fine summer evening, and I remember Mr. and Mrs. Gosse entering the drawing-room. Gosse was wearing a white tie and carried in his hands a little case containing five or six thin volumes.

'I have brought you,' he said, 'a gift. The new complete edition of Swinburne which I have edited.'

At this moment my brother Sacheverell dashed nervously into conversation with the remark:

'How delightful to have them at last in a cheap edition.'

Sir Edmund gave him a look of disfavour and distrust, and then emphatically enounced the words:

'NOT SO CHEAP AS ALL THAT.'

For he took offence with a hair-trigger-like ease and delicacy,

though, also, he soon forgot it. When, therefore, he had assured himself that no disrespect had been intended, he became again his most delightful self, high-spirited and full of humour of his own kind. It was, I remember, upon that night that he related the following adventure of a young friend of his. This small boy, aged three, who had just cut his first tooth, was inordinately proud of it and anxious to put it to a use. One fine morning he was taken out for a walk in Hyde Park by his nurse, and presently passed an old gentleman asleep in a chair.

'What is that old gentleman doing?' the child inquired.

'Hush, dear, he's asleep.'

'Then I know what I'll do,' the ingenious child replied; 'I'll bite him with my tooth,' and before the nurse could stop him he had planted it firmly in the old gentleman's calf. . . . But every that child, it transpired, was eventual heir to a dukedom.

It cannot, I apprehend, be denied that Gosse was a snob: a vice which it is now fashionable to condemn overmuch. He possessed the romantic, late-Victorian temperament, and liked the minor Elizabethan dramatists, cathedrals, dukes, ruins, echoes and ghosts. Nor, perhaps, is it inapposite to recall in this connection that his mother—who had died when he was only eight years of age—had come from Boston, and that through her, to whom titles, no doubt, were exotic because strange and a link with antiquity, may have been transmitted an interest in them, as well as a Bostonian appreciation of culture. Be these conjectures as they may, to Gosse a title was something 'that took him out of himself'—that process which, though it sounds so painful as an extraction, is always said to benefit him who undergoes it. The very sound of an historic title raised him above the level of current commercial squalor. There were, he had always known, realms of light existing somewhere overhead, an earthly heaven as it were, which only a few mundane elect were privileged to enter. To a participance, *ex officio*, in this glory, he gained access with the librarianship of the House of Lords.

There he could sit, under the splendour of all the Kings of England, while the bearers of titles that had been hitherto familiar to him from the pages of Shakespeare's plays moved dimly through the gilded twilight: Bedford and Beaufort, Warwick, Westmorland and Suffolk, Norfolk and Somerset and Northumberland, Stanley, Hastings and Harcourt. But though his love

of titles was, in a sense, literary, and in no way detracted from—
 if, indeed, actually it did not add to—his passionate comprehension
 of literature before his own day, it did, on the other hand, some-
 times a little impede his proper valuing of contemporary work.
 While with most of the modern poets—and this was the splendid
 thing about him, poetry was so close to his heart—to whose verse
 he drew attention, his enthusiasm, whether or not mistaken, was
 founded upon genuine literary principles, and governed by stan-
 dards which, if not infallible, were yet to be respected, neverthe-
 less he liked to play for safety—and titles spelt safety. A book of poems
 by the widow of a former Viceroy of India or the younger son of
 a marquis would be sure to obtain favourable mention in the
 Press—and the chorus would inevitably be led by Gosse. Even the
 younger son of a baron—nor need the barony be more than a year
 or two old—would win approval on his own terms. If, in addition,
 the author was, let us say, a young diplomat, and not a real writer
 at all, he would be yet more dearly cherished; for in England the
 amateur has ever been Emperor. His little diplomatic jokes
 and sayings would be repeated and rubbed up. . . . Yet
 Gosse liked above every other a title combined with real
 administrative ability and eminence. Lord Curzon and Lord
 Haldane, of such was his kingdom of heaven composed, for no
 dukedom, even, however high sounding and traditional, could
 obscure for him native idiocy, and one of the most attractive points
 in his character was his detestation of fools.

The librarianship of the House of Lords offered him, indeed,
 exquisite pleasure, for its halls were the haunts of ponderous pro-
 consuls and witty cabinet ministers. Moreover, it afforded him a
 regular income and sufficient leisure, besides the formerly
 visionary friendship of the great. And for those whose pursuits
 did not include literature it provided him with a valuable label.
 'Who is that? that chap over there?' 'That's Gosse, you know,
 the Librarian of the House of Lords, feller who writes books.' Even
 that did not sufficiently enlighten everyone, however, for I was
 in the Marlborough Club, when a naval officer who was washing
 his hands in the next basin to Gosse, turned to him, and remarked,
 'Hullo, Gosse! I didn't know you were an author, but I see you've
 just brought out a book called *The Pirate's Who's Who*;¹ some jolly
 good notices you've had, too.'

¹ A delightful book by his son. Dr. Philip Gosse.

As he grew older, however, he expected people to know who he was, and if they did not, trouble was likely to come. . . . I must have been in the middle of the '20's that I motored over from my father's house in Scarborough to have luncheon with the Gosses, who were staying in a large hotel in Whitby. Gosse always entered into what he was doing with his whole heart. On holiday, for example, he was more on holiday—more, I mean, in holiday spirits, holiday clothes, and seemed to have read more guide-books to the particular district he was visiting, and certainly to have acquired more genuine knowledge of it in a shorter time—than anyone I have ever known. . . . It began by being rather a stormy day, for that morning it had become apparent that neither the manager of the hotel, nor his wife, had ever heard of the name Gosse. The bearer of it was by no means inclined to take this lying down, but was determined to strike a blow for English culture. That I was still Liberal candidate for the division, and that his remarks might cost me a vote or two, he did not care in the least. Manœuvring us to a table in the lounge, just beneath the mahogany box in which the untutored couple disported themselves, inking figures into the accounts and stamping papers, Gosse took up the best tactical position, and declaimed in a loud determined voice:

'I have never had the fortune to visit this part before, Osbert. The country round is interesting, but oh, what an Uncultured Lot inhabit it, and this town! I assure you, they know nothing. They have never even opened a book. They might be black savages in the Congo! Even the Esquimaux are better educated—but dear Lady N. has been most kind, so we don't feel quite lost and as if we were in a foreign country.'

Having carried out this rather ineffectual punitive expedition, his mood then changed, and in consequence I spent an enchanting afternoon, during which he told me the following story of his only meeting with C. M. Doughty. This had taken place at Cambridge in 1920, when they were both entertained to luncheon by the appropriate authorities after being awarded honorary degrees.

'A strange man, a very strange fellow, indeed,' Gosse observed. 'My friends who knew him had all agreed in telling me what a privilege it was to meet him. He was different from everyone else they told me—a recluse, austere, unaffected, a man of the greatest

integrity, who lived only for his art and asked nothing of the world, because he desired nothing for himself. . . . At luncheon, he sat opposite me. We did not speak but once during the meal, when he suddenly called across the table:

"Mr. Gosse! Mr. Gosse! I have wanted for so long to ask you a question; have *you* read anything after the time of Spenser?"

"Yes, indeed, I have; but have not you, Mr. Doughty?"

"No, never, Mr. Gosse."

"So I remarked, "Then it must have cut you off from a great deal."

"That was all that we said; but, after the luncheon, when the others had gone to put on their robes and we were left alone, you can imagine my surprise when Mr. Doughty leant across the table and said to me in quite a different voice, and in, oh, such a vehement whisper:

"Excuse me, Mr. Gosse, but can you get me the O.M.?"

It was upon this same afternoon, too, that Gosse told me how Yeats had described to him an unusual adventure. The poet, it appeared, had been walking down Bond Street when he met a friend whom he liked, but whose conduct he could not approve, and who on this occasion was accompanied by an uncommon spiritual extension of his personality, for after they had spoken, and Yeats passed on, he noticed that behind the sinner trailed in procession six small *green* elephants; to those in the secret, a sure symbol of moral obliquity.

Gosse, confronting the psychic with the matter-of-fact, had said to Yeats, 'Well, I don't think it's fair to let a thing like that put you against a man!'

There can be no doubt that Gosse was wonderful company. The charm of his talk increased rather than diminished with age; for, unlike the majority of old people, it seemed as though with the passing of the years his spirits rose, and he became more gay—and more quick to anger. And this emphasizing of high points in his character found a reflection in his appearance. Sir Edmund—he had been knighted in 1925—was beginning to lose the sight of one eye, and so he was obliged to wear a green lens over it to protect it from the light. This afforded him a tactical advantage, for, though he saw at all times at least twice as much with his one good eye as anyone else did with two, nobody suspected it. And it imparted to him something of the rakish air of a pirate chieftain,

crafty but indomitable. You could perceive that he sailed the sea under his own flag. Moreover, he never lost an amazingly youthful gusto for ruse and stratagem, even when unnecessary; an expression of high spirits comparable to the use of conceits by the Elizabethan poets, and this, added to his choice of words, and his own typical point of view, made his company a delight. The symptoms of old age he showed, or chose to show: the forgetting and mixing up of people's names and achievements, the humiliating abbreviations to which he subjected their Christian names, the inquiries after people who were strangers to them or after some imaginary illness from which they had never suffered; all these, I am sure, were but new tricks he had added to his repertory of new weapons for his armoury, and were assumed, as surely as that whisper that he sometimes now adopted, in order to induce people to think that he was growing feeble. Actually, this whisper was so beautifully produced that each syllable was louder, more resonant and more distinct than any pronounced by a voice of ordinary power. What could be more distinct than that, gradually, all others in the room should become quiet, and listen to what he said?

No account of Gosse, then, should omit the sheer quality of *fun* which he possessed to the highest degree, and which his presence never failed to impart to any gathering. Yet it is precisely this of which I have seen little mention in descriptions of him. If he were in the room, you never knew quite what might happen, in what direction the tiger would pounce—certainly not in the direction you expected: and through this feeling of nervousness came a profound sense of liveliness, of expectancy and consequent sparkle. You enjoyed, in fact, every moment as though it might be your—or somebody else's—last. And this capacity of his, so difficult to summon up for the reader, was accompanied by a superb technique of battle, intensely individual, and showing in this more subtle form of contest the strength of a great boxer, the virtuosity of a great fencer. Feint and counter-feint, it constituted a whole system, devised by one man in the course of a lifetime and permeated by his personal quality.

Let us take two instances of this technique. One of Gosse's long rivalries had been with Sir Sidney Colvin, the keeper of the Print Room in the British Museum. His wife had been the widow of a distant cousin of mine, a clergyman, and though her first marriage

had been by no means happy, she had remained on very good terms with some of my relations. In consequence, she and Sir Sidney were very kind to my sister and me when we began to write. It was difficult not occasionally to mention the Colvins to the Gosses, or the Gosses to the Colvins, but it was better if possible to avoid such a trap, for the two men possessed competing proprietary claims to the whole body of English poetry, but especially to Keats, on whom both of them had written, and to Stevenson, who had been an intimate friend of each of them. But in the last direction it could not be denied that Colvin led, for, in addition, Lady Colvin had, before her second marriage, been Stevenson's friend and confidante, and his series of letters to her formed the best and most vivid picture of his life. . . . It was, then, at some special Stevenson celebration, long after his death, that the organizers had asked both Gosse and Colvin to speak, without informing either of them that the other was to be present. On arrival they could hardly believe what their eyes told them, and remained glaring at each other from seats on either side of the chairman during his introductory address. After that was finished, Sir Sidney was called on, and made a long and detailed oration. During this, Gosse ceased to glare, and, instead, fidgeted, smiled and waved his hand lightly at various members of the audience with whom he was acquainted. Then, when called on in his turn to speak, he rose, at his most sprightly, and said:

'Ladies and gentlemen, I came here with a few platitudes prepared for your edification, for I had not been aware that Sir Sidney was to speak to you this afternoon. But, sure enough, he has delivered them all, so I shall say nothing.'

He then sat down.

I was privileged to witness, and be a victim of, his special technique at the Marlborough Club one summer day. I entered, and saw Gosse sitting alone, in a corner, brightly lit from a skylight, near the empty fireplace. He had placed himself with his back to the wall, and was wearing over one eye the green shade to which I have alluded, and which, somehow, it was impossible not to associate with coming trouble; as though it were a sign of battle, comparable to a pirate openly running up the Jolly Roger before opening fire. He looked intently at me, with a rather gloomy expression, but he seemed not to identify me in any way, so I passed on and took a table further down the room. I noticed,

just beyond, E. F. Benson, who was not a member of this Club but was being entertained to luncheon by a friend. Later I was in the morning-room opposite, having coffee, when Benson and his host came to sit very near me, and we exchanged greetings. Gosse now entered, and at once approached me, as though he could see only myself in the whole room, though previously he had not known who I was. That, and something in his delicate tread, in the actual manner in which he placed his feet down on the carpet, warned me that he was at his games. Still he kept his gaze fixed on me, seeing no one else, and then he spoke:

‘Was that Fred Benson I saw in the dining-room?’ he inquired in his stage-elephant whisper; ‘was it really? . . . If so, he looks much older, oh, *so much older*, than when I saw him last. . . But then, I recollect, his father died at the same age.’

During these few seconds I had tugged unavailingly at his sleeve, and had said, ‘Be careful! Be careful! He’s just near you.’

Gosse paid no attention, but continued unflinchingly but irrelevantly, and in a louder voice:

‘Quite a nice chap, I’m told, if you get to know him. But how can one do that? One never sees him anywhere. And besides, could never get on with a man who sees *spooks*!’

I never was able fully to grasp the allusion in this last remark for Benson had never seen ghosts, or pretended to; though his brother, A. C. Benson, if I remember right, had written about them. Moreover, Gosse himself was interested in ghosts, and had shown me more than once a photograph he had taken, by chance of a spectre at Ightham Mote; a monk with a rope round his neck. But if I did not understand, I could see that Benson did. The shaft had gone home. But he said nothing to make his presence officially known, and Gosse went over to the window, and sat down in a comfortable armchair to read a paper, only occasionally letting his roving but empty eye sweep the room.

★ ★ ★ ★

Almost the last time I met Sir Edmund—as he had become—and enjoyed an afternoon’s outing with him was, I think, in the summer of 1927—for in the winter I was abroad, and I only saw him once after that, in April the following year; and then he was ill and tired. But on the afternoon to which I refer he was gay and lively and formidable as ever. I had encountered him by chance at

the Marlborough, but he seemed to be expecting me, and proposed that we should at once set out for the Hawthornden Prize-giving, due at 3.30 in the Æolian Hall in Bond Street. I had forgotten even that it was to take place that day, but when thus exhorted to go, fell in with the suggestion. Of course I smelt a rat, and realized that the cat was on its trail; but I knew that the afternoon would prove to be an experience, and my curiosity also urged me on. Looking back, I can see clearly enough that he had fallen out with the members of the Committee of the Hawthornden Prize (though certainly he had been on very good terms with them not long before, and had presented the prize once, if not twice, himself), and that his peculiar and accurate knowledge of contemporary shades of literary feeling made him realize fully the effect that his entrance with me at this function would create. I was far from *persona grata* in the bird-loving poetical circles of those days, when a damp and draggled thrush still signified what Karl Marx came to mean to the next generation, only a year or two away over the horizon of the decade. I had publicly mocked the ceremony, and not long before had written, in the guise of a poster, signing myself 'The Major', to a newspaper, prophesying the winner—in fact, I gave 'a double', the winner for that year and next. My prophecy, being based on a neat calculation of political and poetical pros and cons, had proved correct, and this had placed the Committee in an awkward position, since the tip had appeared in the paper ten days before the award had been made, and it was one of the rules that the Committee should not finally choose the recipient until the very day of announcing his name and giving him the prize. That being so, the Committee had to send one of its members forward on the platform to explain its surprise at the exactitude of the Major's forecast. ('I can't think how he did it,' the member had kept on saying, rather weakly, in that's voice.) Of course it had not come out that it was my doing, but I was suspect, and it had not added to my popularity among that little band. But further, three years before, I had published *Triple Fugue*, in which the title-story described a literary prize-giving and a professor, said openly by some to resemble Sir Edmund. (I never knew his own view of this, but he often mentioned the book in an unconstrained way, saying how much he had enjoyed reading it.) And, in addition, it was thought that my literary opinions would be too advanced for Sir Edmund,

whose most daring boundary was *Georgian Poetry*. . . . All these factors admittedly, however, rendered it the more unlikely that we should attend the presentation together, and he had concluded that our entrance would strike terror into the hearts of the common enemy—and so, undoubtedly, it did!

The members of the audience were chattering in the foyers and corridors when we arrived. As we passed, voices were hushed, and the smooth prize-giving faces wilted, the lovelocks of the critics greyed and became more dank as we looked at them, and lankier. Sir Edmund, for the most part, maintained—for one eye was covered by the shade—a blind, unseeing eye that gazed in front of him and looked, X-ray-like, through those on whom it happened, in the direct line of vision, to fasten; but like a searchlight it would from time to time sweep round, or turn and play upon those near him. Soon a dangerous recognition would dawn in it, a smile, in the eye itself, would be stoked up with manifest artificiality, and this would be followed by a momentary but perilous effusiveness that plainly led nowhere, even if he did not make it clear that he thought he was addressing the wrong person.

Having thus stalked to our seats, we remained in the position about four rows from the front, which he had chosen. He looked grave and preoccupied, and surveyed the audience with apparent surprise. He said nothing, though many an ear was tilted to catch the sound. Only when the doors had been shut and the speeches had begun he occasionally gave vent to a very menacing clearing of the throat. . . . Still he said nothing, nothing—until a high pitched nervous twitter and wordless lisp, together with cries of 'It's darling Bobbie!' from the serried old ladies, told us that a well-known patron of the poetry of the time was speaking. The words lacked momentum. They soared like listless sparrows over the audience. Suddenly, however, one sentence stood out: 'Above all, this young man shows *promise*, shows *promise*' [louder]. Then Sir Edmund, clothing himself in the full weight of his years, and looking for once every moment of his seventy-seven, turned to me with a ferocious but infantine geniality, and said, with that mastery of elocution which made his words reach every head in the hall, 'Ossie!' (a name by which nobody has ever called me), 'Ossie! Do you consider that *I* show promise?'

HERBERT READ

VULGARITY AND IMPOTENCE

SPECULATIONS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ARTS

A few years ago one might have used the more familiar title 'Dignity and Impudence' to describe the artistic scene. There was a National Gallery, its walls majestic with the genius of past ages; there was a Royal Academy defending, however inadequately, a tradition of rectitude; and barking in the face of these dignified institutions were all the revolutionaries and secessionists constituting 'the modern movement'. Tradition has retired into bomb-proof cellars and caves (it has a scarcity value) and the modern movement is a refugee, heard of occasionally in Lisbon, Mexico City, Mozambique or the Isle of Man. What remains on the scene? Two exhibitions, now being held in London, provide the answer.

At Lancaster House (the London Museum) there is a brave attempt to rally the modern movement—'New Movements in Art: Contemporary Work in England: An Exhibition of Recent Painting and Sculpture', to give it its full title. It will be remembered that before the war the modern movement was advancing in two separate and somewhat antagonistic columns, under the banners of constructivism and surrealism. Here (the surrealist column sadly depleted) they march along together, showing work for the most part executed since the outbreak of the war. It would not, I think, be fair to judge the present position of surrealism from this exhibition—to that I will return presently. But so far as constructivism is concerned, let it be said at once that the column is advancing: never was there such a miracle of precision and harmony as Gabo's 'Construction in Space—Spiral Theme' (1941): never has Ben Nicholson controlled his dimensional relationships with such a sure instinct: and there are new recruits to the movement (Peter Lanyon, John Wells, Alastair Morton and C. Stephenson) who show that expansion and development are

possible in this direction. What Miss Ramsden, in an introductory note to the catalogue, calls 'the intrinsic merits of the work', is not in question: these artists, and others represented in the exhibition, 'pre-eminently fulfil the requirements of an æsthetic standard'. In doing that, and that alone, they anticipate any questioning of the social relevance of their work. Art is always socially relevant, or it is not art. In fulfilling the requirements of an æsthetic standard, a work of art is fulfilling the requirements of a social standard, for an æsthetic standard is an organic standard, a biologically functional standard, and you cannot make a button or a penknife, a bridge or a petrol-pump, a painting or a statue, without invoking this identical standard. Surrealism and constructivism, traditional values and revolutionary experiments, must meet on this same testing-ground of organic fitness. It is simply a question of survival—of the survival of art and of national survival; for if there is a division between a people and its art, it means that one or the other is no longer organically fit, organically vital, and will no longer survive.

That such a division now exists in this country is proved by a visit to the Forces Exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery. This is a jury-free exhibition: the only qualification is membership of one of the civil defence or military forces. It consists, not only of drawings and paintings, but also of the miscellaneous products of 'leisure moments'—carvings in wood and chalk, model engines and aeroplanes, pokerwork and pastiches of every kind. It is, therefore, a fair and uncensored representation of popular taste. In criticizing such an exhibition, one is always in the invidious position of the Superior Person, but even a worm could lift its head above this level. What stretches before us is the sordid scum left by a receding civilization. Æsthetic criticism has no function here: it is an affair for the social pathologist. But to that science the art critic is inevitably driven day by day, and I doubt whether the war has left him with any other relevant basis. For at the other extreme, this art of pure intuition exemplified by the works of Mondrian, Gabo and Ben Nicholson—is this not also a social phenomenon, something left high and very dry by the same receding tide?

I ask this question with no certainty of giving a convincing answer, because before answering it I must make certain affirmations which will not be acceptable to those who will be inclined

to agree with my answer. I must affirm in the first place that the art represented—to keep to a specific example—by Gabo's 'Spiral Theme', is the highest point ever reached by the æsthetic intuition of man. This form, hovering like a still but librating falcon between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, is the crystallization of the purest sensibility for harmonious relationships: and whereas, in constructivist art generally, this crystallization is a mere planning of static relationships, here an axial system crystallizes energy itself. Creation is a much abused word, applied loosely to imitations and logical constructions: it is justified only for that absolute lyricism we call 'pure poetry', for music, for certain branches of mathematics, and for constructivism in the plastic arts (which includes architecture). But even within this absolute world there is an hierarchy, and at the summit I would place this spatial construction of Gabo's.

In constructivism we have attained, after twenty-five centuries of irrelevant groping, the kind of art envisaged by Plato as the basic art—the art of pure relationships. Anyone who does not understand constructivism does not understand Plato's theory of art—and that includes most philosophers and classical scholars. The utmost banality of imagination and lack of sensibility are shown precisely by those people who construe constructivist art as merely 'decorative'—though personally I do not condone the derogatory use of this word: to say of a work of art that it is decorative is merely to admit that it is pleasing, and what pleases is good art. I find a relief by Ben Nicholson very decorative in the right setting, just as, in *its* appropriate setting, I find a relief by Agostino Duccio very decorative: decoration merely implies the accommodation of a work of art to its environment, and their failure to accommodate themselves to any contemporary environment is precisely what is wrong with so many contemporary works of art. I do not exclude the possibility that it is the environment which should be changed.

Indeed, the environment is changing very rapidly: war is dissolving it, this war which is a symptom of the greatest social evolution since the fall of the Roman Empire. That is what I mean by my image of the receding tide, and the question we are asking is, not so much whether the tide will ever flow again—for that is the only presupposition which can justify any intellectual

activity at all—but whether, when it does return to our shores, any of this art which we now call contemporary will float on its crest. In other words, is any of this art which we may see at the London Museum, or any art visible elsewhere, prophetic of things to come?

Before I attempt to answer this question, let us glance at the scattered and repeatedly decimated ranks of the surrealists. I have already suggested that they should not be judged by the inadequate representation of their recent work at the London Museum. Leslie Hurry's drawings are the only exhibits which come within the precise definitions that have from time to time been given of that activity: they alone seem to possess authentic automatism. Where, then, shall we find the main body of this force which, only six years ago, was storming all our fortresses? Apparently in New York City. There the Grand Instigator (he has refused more pontifical titles) has landed from a refugee boat and already established a consistory from which proceed the familiar encyclicals and bulls of excommunication. Salvador Dalí anagrammatically transformed into Avida Dollars, is smirched and obliterated with 'black bile'. Eluard is condemned for his collaboration in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, now reappearing in Paris under the sponsorship of the Nazis. The movement thus loses its best painter and its best poet. Breton can still count on Max Ernst, André Masson and Yves Tanguy, all now in America, and there is a motley access of new recruits, many of them, no doubt, embarrassing to the G.I. But Dalí is the only painter who shows any signs of vitality and of social relevance. He himself has described his new phase as 'classical', but judging from the reproductions of his recent work which have just reached this country, 'baroque' would be a better word, and neo-romantic better still. As for evidence of Dalí's vitality, we find it in the ever increasing fertility of his linear inventiveness, in the novelty and efficiency of his images. His social relevance consists in a violent and consistently maintained protest against the inhumanity of the machine age. This is evident in his titles alone—for example: 'Debris of an automobile giving birth to a blind horse biting a telephone' which is not a clever joke, in conception or execution, but a tragic poetry. But equally with Breton we must recognize the

¹ *Salvador Dalí*. By James Thrall Soby. New York. (Museum and Modern Art.)

paradox of Dali, which Breton describes in crueller terms. This artist is a typical product of the civilization he renounces and reviles. He has none of the integrity of a Jean Giono or an Eric Gill: he looks swell in a Mercedes-Benz. He is the idol of the socialites, the pet of expatriated aristocrats and dollar princesses. He cynically exploits the sensationalism incidental to his art. A movement which, whatever its faults, has never for a moment compromised with social inequality, may well be excused for not tolerating such behaviour in its ranks. But the defections and exclusions which have characterized the movement since its beginnings have produced a very confused impression on the mind of the public, and a Third Manifesto, which is said to be in preparation, will need to be a very unequivocal document if this confusion is to be dissipated.

On his arrival in New York, Breton gave an interview which has been published in *View* (Vol. I, Nos. 7-8, published at 360 E. 55th Street, New York). It is a strange mixture of puerility and wisdom. It is perhaps understandable that after the stress of invasion, defeat, escape and exile, Breton should announce his 'initiation into the mysteries of American butterflies'; but it is a little difficult to accept the invention of a *card game* which 'proposes to throw an ideological bridge between two worlds' as an event of major significance in this time of Armageddon. But Breton does make one or two observations which show that surrealism may still have some contribution to make to the reintegration of our civilization. He insists, for example, that we are at the end of 'the illusion of independence, I will even say of the transcendence, of the work of art'. He attacks the *egocentrism* of the modern artist and poet, and reminds us that Lautréamont's precept, 'Poetry should be made by all, not by one', remains one of the fundamental tenets of surrealism. He points out, and it is profoundly true, that the egocentrism of the artist brings with it 'indifferentism' (the artist sets himself above the *mêlée*, believes himself entitled to an Olympian attitude) and this state in its turn entails stagnation, for the artist swiftly exhausts his individual resources and is only capable of sapless variations on a threadbare theme.

This point of view has been implicit in Breton's philosophy in the past, and it is thanks to Breton that surrealism has always had a sociological orientation. One therefore turns eagerly to the few

words which he devoted to the future. In so far as they are expressed in general terms, they are not disappointing. The following passage strikes me as being inspired by tragic experience and fundamental insight:

In thumbing through the works of those who pretend to profit from France's defeat, I am struck by the briefness, not to say sterility, of their views. Conquerors and conquered appear to me headed for the same abyss if they do not instruct themselves before it is too late in the process which set them one against the other: in the course of such a process, the exhaustion of the economic causes of the conflict will but emphasize, in effect, the common misery of our contemporaries, which in the last analysis is doubtless of an ideological order: it is rationalism, a *closed rationalism* which is killing the world; physical violence is unconsciously accepted, justified as the issue of mental passivity: in this game the least permeable thoughts—Cartesian for instance—are those which turn out to be the quickest overthrown. This is so true, the 'giving up' so general, despair so great, that many ask if the salvation of man does not demand his 'disintellectualization' for the sake of a revaluation of his prime instincts. It is certain that as far as faith, honour and ideals are concerned, one sees everywhere today the *survival of the sign for the thing signified*. Faith, ideals, honour ask to be re-established on new bases: in the meantime all the rags which don't even cling to the body any more ought to be shaken.

Faith, honour, ideals—three years ago these would have been strange words on the lips of a surrealist, but we must respect Breton for his courage in uttering them, his realization that our tragic situation requires an affirmation of values which have for too long been abused by bourgeois moralists, but which, in their integrity, remain the basis of any natural human order. I will not quote Breton's indications of the specific activities to be followed to achieve this revaluation of values—they might seem a little trivial against the wider vision. I am glad to see that they include a consideration of the significance of Gestalt psychology, for the application of this particular theory to the spheres of art and education promises to be more fruitful than any other system of psychology, psychoanalysis included.

In agreeing with Breton that a system of closed rationalism is responsible for the present state of the world, and that a process of

'disintellectualization' is necessary for our salvation, one must be careful to make certain distinctions. The protagonists of fascism have spoken in similar terms. It may be said that we all agree that what is necessary is a revaluation of man's 'prime instincts'. We disagree as to what constitutes these prime instincts. Or if we can agree on a scientific classification of these instincts, we may then disagree on the relative values to be placed on them. According to MacDougall, for example, the prime instincts are of flight, of repulsion, of curiosity, of pugnacity, of self-abasement and self-assertion, of reproduction (the sexual instinct), of acquisition, of construction, of feeding, together with the parental and the gregarious instincts. Here, obviously, there is plenty of room for disagreement, and any valuation of such diverse instincts must obviously be guided by an overriding philosophy—a general conception of the purpose of life or the destiny of man. Roughly speaking, the instincts can be divided into antagonistic pairs, and I believe that the distinction between all these pairs is implicit in the situation whose characteristic outcome is the Œdipus complex. In the origins of love and hate we may seek the origins of self-abasement and self-assertion, of curiosity and repulsion, of gregariousness and pugnacity. On the one side we have instincts which are essentially egocentric, or phylocentric, and these are the instincts which the fascist philosophy exalts above all others. On the other side we have instincts of mutual aid and constructiveness which *should* be the instincts exalted by an anti-fascist or democratic philosophy. It is perfectly possible to distinguish certain instincts and encourage these at the expense of other instincts, and a philosophy which merely looks forward to the free play of any or all the basic instincts is a defeatism of the most fundamental kind. Better fascism than such indifferentism.

The closed rationalism to which Breton refers has not been a philosophy of indifferentism, though it has been largely a philosophy of unconscious assumptions. The most disastrous of these is the very general assumption that devotion to an intellectual concept is an adequate safeguard against the anti-social instincts. Such concepts are typical products of what is proudly claimed as 'the scientific attitude' (though it is no longer characteristic of the most advanced scientists) and are so prevalent and various that it needs a considerable effort of the will to be conscious of their existence. To mention only a few: the

belief that every effect must have a cause; the belief that exact statements can be made about phenomenal events; the belief that feeling can be eliminated from thought; the belief in the real existence of entities like the state, the church, the working classes; the belief in the absolute nature of a particular code of morals; the belief in a *natural* distinction between right and wrong, good and bad, and in the whole system of pedagogic and social discipline built up on such a distinction.

Fascism is the intellectualization of certain instincts which hitherto mankind has not thought worthy of intellectualization—those instincts of self-assertion, acquisition and pugnacity which can be given the emotional drive and cohesion of racial-assertion. It is a further intellectual assumption that these instincts have a high survival value—an assumption which is not, I believe, supported by biological evidence.

It may seem that to speak as Breton does of reviving 'faith, honour and ideals' is only to fall into the same trap, but that is to ignore the fact that these words indicate emotional attitudes and not intellectual concepts. These attitudes will be based on sensibility, above all on æsthetic sensibility. And this is where Gestalt psychology comes in, for it is being shown, that in the very act of perception itself, and *a fortiori* in the higher organizations of experience known as sensation, memory, learning, thinking and reasoning, the æsthetic judgment is decisive. Our new ideals must be established on a recognition of this fundamental psychological fact, and this means that the whole of our educational and moral outlook must be reorientated away from intellection and towards sensibility. We must overthrow the tyranny of the concept.

It is against the necessity of this reconstruction of our modes of thought and behaviour that we must judge the relevance of the contemporary movements in art. In approaching constructivism from this new point of view it would at first sight seem highly suspect, for here is an art which dispenses with the image, and which might be described as essentially conceptual. And that indeed is the basis of the popular complaint about it—people say it is too austere, or too Puritanical, or too intellectual for them. Strictly speaking, what the constructivists dispense with is the *pictorial* image, not the image itself: for a certain defined space, or area of colour, is no less an image than the image of a flower or a human face. The relevant question is whether the constructivist's

use of images is sensible and organic, and I must assert that in the case of those artists who really understand what they are doing (Gabo, for instance), it undoubtedly is. Nevertheless, there is a qualification to be made. I think it is perfectly fair to accuse these artists of egocentrism, as Breton does. More particularly, they suffer from the illusion of the *transcendence* of the work of art. It is quite true that certain composers of music, certain mathematicians and logicians, certain metaphysicians, suffer from the same illusion. Whatever kind of secret or arcane activity the artist or the philosopher may pursue in his 'laboratory'—and such activity is not only legitimate but necessary—he must then sacrifice his discoveries on the altar of the common good. The only real progress is communal progress, and that is why we must exalt the instinct of mutual aid above all other instincts (to the extent of recognizing that the community is the human race and not the intellectually isolated tribe). The work of art is only satisfied in the organic ritual of life, and it is only in so far as the constructivist succeeds, not only in constructing these platonic models of reality, but also in modifying the communal environment, that he acquires the full stature of the humanist. The artist is not even the mediator between the real and the ideal—that, again, is to over-estimate his gifts. The artist, to quote a precept which does not differ materially from Lautréamont's, is not a special kind of man: every man is a special kind of artist.

These strictures apply no less forcibly to surrealism. When one has set aside the pathetic charlatanism which has always disfigured the movement, we are left with a very essential activity, one which the closed system of rationalism has always striven to repress. To pretend that the intimations of unconscious mental activity which we receive in dreams, and which find universal expression in religion, myth, folklore and ritual—to pretend that all these manifestations belong to the childhood of mankind and can be safely ignored by a rational civilization, is the supreme conceit of the human intellect. For that ignorant folly more than for anything else we suffer our present agony. In any reintegration of civilization, what the surrealists call the conquest of the irrational, but which might more subtly be called the wooing of the irrational, must play a decisive part—in education, in drama, in film, in every form of activity that invokes the pictorial image.

But finally let us realize that it is completely useless to indulge

in these speculations on the purely ideological plane. I began by saying that the art critic has been compelled to become a social pathologist; but when he turns to the future he can only conceive it in terms of social reconstruction. These activities which we call art are social activities, they are communal activities. As such they are not *conscious* activities—no community ever said 'Now let us be artistic for a change'. It might have said 'Now let us praise God' or 'Now let us work' or 'Now let us play'. The art was not even a by-product of these activities: it was the substance of them. That is why it is not conceivable that a new civilization is possible without a social and economic revolution. Some people think that a change of heart is all that is needed. Hearts have been changing by the million in these last two years, but they still ache with insatiable longings. The mountains are moving. Faith, honour and ideals are hovering above the battlefields. But do not let us disguise the material immensity of our task. So much that we have practised as a diversion must be renounced: so much that we have valued for its refinement must be submerged. The world for many years will be at work, working overtime, working all the time, obsessed with work. It is our chance, for in the transformation of work we may see the organic growth of art.

ARTURO BAREA

NOTES ON FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

III. THE POET AND DEATH

WHEN Federico Garcia Lorca had been murdered, in July 1936 at daybreak, in his own city of Granada, Antonio Machado wrote the lament: Machado who in 1914 had hoped for a new youth to grow up, 'clear like the diamond, like the diamond pure', on the blood-drenched, rot-poisoned ground of Spain; Machado who died in his bitter French exile in 1939, surviving the younger poet by the two and a half years of the Spanish War.

He called the middle part of his lament for Lorca *El Poeta y la Muerte*, The Poet and Death, and it runs:

He was seen walking with her, alone,
 Without fear of Her scythe.
 —First sun on tower and tower, hammers
 On anvils—anvil and anvil of the forges.
 Federico spoke,
 Courting Death. And She listened.
 'Because yesterday, companion, the beat
 Of your dry palms sounded through my verse
 And you gave the ice to my song and the edge
 Of your silver sickle to my tragedy,
 I will sing you the flesh you have not,
 The eyes you lack,
 The hair which the storm whipped,
 The red lips where they kissed you . . .
 Today as yesterday, Death, my gypsy,
 It is very good to be with you, alone,
 In these winds of Granada, of my Granada.'

Two lines of this poem contain the vision of dawn in Granada, with the first flush on her many towers and the first sound of her day, the hammers in the countless forges of gypsy coppersmiths. Four lines of this poem express what all Lorca's friends knew and all his public felt: the ever-present idea of death, the intimacy with death, which permeated and dyed his poetic work and was the overpowering influence in his spiritual life.

A couple of years before his death, radiantly successful and still young, he wrote his song 'Of the Clear Death':

There is no one who in giving a kiss
 does not feel the smile of faceless people,
 no one who, touching a new-born child,
 can forget the motionless horse skulls.

For what the roses seek in the forehead
 is a hard landscape of bones,
 and the hands of men have no other meaning
 but to copy the roots underground . . .

The deep longing for a continuation of life, of his life, beyond

his death made him feel and live with a haunted clarity from his beginning to his end. He wrote when he was twenty:

Everything alive that passes
through the gates of death
walks with lowered head
and a white air of sleep . . .
wrapped in the silence
which is the cloak of death . . .

may my blood on the field
be sweet rosy loam
where tired labourers
sink their hoes.

Fifteen years later his images had darkened, but they were still striving to express the same struggle:

I don't want to hear again that the dead do not lose their blood,
that the rotting mouth still asks for water;
I don't want to know of the ordeal by grass
nor of the moon with a serpent's mouth
at work before daybreak.

I want to sleep for a while,
for a while, a minute, a century,
but all shall know that I have not died,
that there is a stable of gold on my lips,
that I am the little friend of the West wind,
that I am the giant shadow of my tears . . .

R. M. Nadal says that 'those nearest to him knew well how after a day of triumph, in the intimacy of conversation, he was obsessed with the idea of death and the abiding sadness of human things'. Yet this is not merely the morbid obsession of an oversensitive poet who never lost the traces of illness and of the nearness of death in the first years of his childhood. It is not merely his particular awareness of the eternal, universal problem of individual life and death. Lorca felt and rendered with relentless clarity the death obsession of his people.

His most obscure images are a condensed vision of things felt or seen by all of us: the 'motionless horse skulls'—*las inmóviles calaveras de caballo*—are the nightmare skeletons of horses and mules which hardly any Spaniard could fail to have seen in the

vines near villages, those animal golgothas. His 'golden stable in my lips'—*un estable de oro en mis labios*—recalls the stable of Bethlehem in the Nativity cribs of our childhood, with its message of a new hope. And just as Lorca's mosaic of images is a heightened and deepened likeness of our Spanish world, his unending struggle with death is ours, filtered through his creative imagination and thus made universal once more.

I cannot trace the origin and the causes of the particular Spanish attitude to death, though I think that the mould was cast in Spain's 'Golden Age' when the Spanish Church built up its organization, simultaneously terrorizing the people with the spectre of death and promising salvation from it. But certainly the traditional as well as the individual Spanish reaction to the idea and reality of death is different from that of other nations, particularly of the English. Elsewhere within European civilization the certainty of death is carefully shut away in a locked drawer of the mind. It is relegated from consciousness and from conversation except when it intrudes. Everyday life is protected by a taboo on the mention of death. The persistent uneasiness—Freud's 'uneasiness in civilization'—is sublimated and covered up. 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die' as it is used in England puts a brisk cent on the merry-making. In Spain, however, we have been brought up to grapple with *La Intrusa*, The Intruder, by remembering, admitting and courting Her—as Machado's vision of Lorca puts it and as Lorca did by his art.

This perpetual consciousness of death gives Spaniards a deep interest in the manner of their death. They feel, like Lorca's psychics, that they want to die in dignity:

*Compadre, quiero morir
decentemente en mi cama,
de acero, si puede ser,
con las sábanas de holanda.*

Friend, I want to die
decently in my bed,
of steel, if it can be,
with sheets of fine linen.

But before this dignified death comes, they want to snatch at every bit of colour in their lives. Lemons, those fruits which are so different on their own soil from the shrunken, acid things people

used to buy at the grocer's here, are one of the Spanish symbols of life, beauty and happiness. The lemon-tree—*limonero de corazón*—turns up in innumerable folk songs and sentimental chansons. In his *Poema del Cante Jondo*, musical verses written to revive and transform the ancient folk art of the Andalusian gypsies, Lorca puts this symbol of a joyous life together with the symbol of death, anonymous death, just as the common people of those villages know it (the body wrapped in a blanket on the floor, an oil lamp beside it, and the mourners along the walls):

*Limoncito amarillo,
limonero,
echad los limoncitos
al viento.
Ya lo sabeis! Porque luego,
luego,
un velón y una manta
en el suelo.*

Yellow little lemon,
lemon tree.
Throw the little lemons
to the wind.
Well you know it: later,
later—
an oil lamp and a blanket
on the floor.

But death has to be challenged. You cannot challenge the great inevitable death which overtakes you, but only the death you choose for yourself. A Spaniard risks his life when it is worth his while to die before his time: then he thinks he has mocked death and defeated her even while he dies, in a manner which honours him and thus gives sense to his lost life.

One of the best Spanish toreros, a gypsy himself—for in the Andalusian gypsies some Spanish qualities have become emphasized that they are more Spanish than the Spanish, which may be one of the reasons why Lorca placed so many of his visions in the gypsy world with its naked emotions—would refuse to fight a bull who was not *bravo*, not fierce and brave. He says simply: 'If this bull who is nothing but an ox kills me—what then? No trouble and no glory.' When he faced a very savage

all he would achieve feats of unbelievable bravery. But if friends then said: 'You've risked your life,' he would simply answer: 'It was worth while,' with an undertone of uneasiness because the bull had not caught him. For if the public were made to recognise that alone his defiance of death had led to the *cogida*, the goring by the bull, he would be very proud.

This code underlies Lorca's two ballads of the splendid gypsy *Antoñito el Camborio*—'Antonio Torres Heredia, son and grandson of *Camborios*'—who goes to Seville to see a bull fight.

*A la mitad del camino
cortó limones redondos
y los fué tirando al agua
hasta que la puso de oro . . .*

In the middle of the journey
he cut off round lemons
and kept throwing them in the water
until it turned all golden . . .

He allows himself to be taken, ingloriously, by five Civil Guards who take him to gaol. It brings dishonour on the well-loved gypsy not to throw away his beautiful life rather than to walk sheepishly along, manacled.

Antonio, who are you?
If you called yourself *Camborio*
you would have made a fountain
of blood, with five jets.
You are nobody's son
and no legitimate *Camborio*.
There are no longer gypsies
as once they walked the hills, alone!
And the old knives are
shivering under the dust.

But *Antoñito*, insulted with the worst insult, that of being nobody's son, regains his honour when he fights his four cousins *Heredias*, sons of *Benamejí*, and dies honourably, with a British:

He bathed in enemy blood
his crimson tie,
but they were four daggers
and he had to succumb . . .

He gave three spurts of blood
and died, face in profile,
Living coin which never
will be repeated.
A swaggering angel lays
his head on a cushion . . .

It may be that to people who, by their traditional way of thinking, are as fiercely jealous of their individual existence as the Spaniards, a tragic, violent death with its mystic smell of blood appears less tragic and futile than a simple human end, because it is a last arrogant assertion of the will, and because knife, dagger or bullet are more tangible and comprehensible than the mere waste of all flesh. Again and again Lorca has sung this violent death from the verses in *flamenco* rhythm of his adolescence in Granada to his last great elegy, the Lament on the Death of the Bullfighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías. The early poems are dominated by popular imagery and melody, by that despairing gypsy charm the poet evoked in *Café Cantante*:

On the dark stage
La Parrala holds
conversation with Death
calling Her,—
She comes not—
and calling Her again.

Yet Federico Garcia Lorca did not merely respond to the awareness of death among his people. He had his personal struggle with death, with his own consciousness of death. He suffered under the Spanish philosophy which Miguel de Unamuno in a book which is a single passionate outcry called 'The Tragic Sense of Life', *El Sentimiento Trágico de la Vida*.

Unamuno refused to resign himself to death as the end of individual life. He rejected the consolation of many religions—spiritual life beyond the grave—and he rejected the Christian consolation—resurrection of the flesh at the end of time. He accepted the Christian teachings in the form of Roman Catholic doctrine because he longed for a faith, but these teachings could not lessen his despair and rebellion. They could promise and guarantee him another life and the resurrection of the flesh, but never the continuation of his personality, his Ego. Neither

spiritual existence nor his resurrected body would be he himself, his living self; nor would that other world be his own world in which he was living. But he wanted passionately to remain himself, in the flesh and the world. Everything else would be nothing; or rather it would be something, but not he. And there was no remedy. The tragedy of Unamuno was that he could not resist from protesting against having to die and yet knew that the annihilation of his personal life was coming, implacably. His 'tragic sense of life' made him equally incapable of resigning himself to his final death as an individual and of deceiving himself into believing in a survival or resurrection of his individual life.

Nobody can live without shielding his mind against this tearing vision. Unamuno created for himself a double, indeed a triple, defence. He put his very despair in words for others, which carried the imprint of his powerful and unique personality—and which survive. He believed in the continuation through children, through his own blood. And he held on to his Christian faith, unbelieving and believing, perhaps much like his own figment, *San Manuel Bueno Martir*, the village priest who could not believe in a life after death and in a resurrection, but continued to preach the Christian faith in an agony of self-negation so that the others should go on dreaming, sheltered from the terrible truth of death.

Federico Garcia Lorca could not cling to the solution of procreation; he felt the fearful greed for survival in the love of mothers for their children and his mind turned to the inherent frustration. He wrote *Bodas de Sangre* and *Yerma* in which death is triumphant. And Lorca did not even try to mitigate the fear and terror of individual death by the consolation of religion. In him the spiritual intimacy with death bred an utter clarity of vision—'the ice to his song', said Machado—which heightened his reaction to the living world but forbade him to blind himself to the finality of individual death. His whole work shows that this was his problem: to live life while facing death, and to survive by becoming part of the surviving world.

Now the death obsession has been transformed into religious mysticism in so many Spaniards that this mysticism has in its turn influenced the death obsession of other Spaniards. Loneliness, the 'solitude' of the mystics, was not bearable unless it opened the vista of a new life of the soul; death whose existence could never be ignored had to be made into a friend who would open the

gates to a true life; terror and fear of death were converted into a frenzied contemplation of death and even a longing for death, to remove its sting. *Me muero porque no muero*, I am dying because I do not die, was the lament of St. Theresa. Many have taken this road to escape from their haunting dread, and the Spanish Church knows only too well why it keeps the idea and vision of physical death with its degrading putrefaction so horribly alive in the minds of its disciples.

But Federico Garcia Lorca, with the upbringing, the background and the indelible stamp of the Spanish Catholic, has never in his creative work shown any trace of having a Catholic, a Christian faith in resurrection and a life beyond death. He fought his death in life, face to face, without help. And, to quote Unamuno, *le ganó con la verdad de la muerte a la razón de la vida*, he was gained for the cause of life by the truth of death.

Lorca's struggle against the pattern of life and death must have begun early, most likely in his first years when a grave illness held him paralysed and released him only to set him apart from the other children. The sick child felt death facing him: his vision of his own end was the blanket on the floor and the oil lamp at his motionless feet. His reaction against this dread of his life and death as they threatened to become was the creation of another life and death, in motion, worth being lived and died: a heightened life and a tragic death. Thus the boy who could not be boisterous like the others attracted them by his mind, by little plays he staged and songs he invented. He found that he could make his life more complete, that he could even dominate others by telling them or showing them what they saw so dimly and he saw so lucidly. I have the feeling that Lorca's constant interest in the stage, his great work in the *Barraca* when he carried classical plays to the countryside with his travelling company of young intellectuals, his puckish texts for marionette performances and Punch and Judy shows, his delight in reciting his own poems and his reluctance to publish anything, have all grown from the same anxiety to keep alive by making himself come alive to others and by playing with life.

This cry for a fearless death sounds through his poetry. The poet speaks to children—I do not know of any other young poet who thought and wrote so much and with such a profound sadness of children—in the *Balada de la Placeta*, the Ballad

of the Little Square, written at about the same period as the poem *Ritmo de Otoño*, Rhythm of Autumn. The children ask him:

What do you feel in your
Red thirsty mouth?

He answers:

*El sabor de los huesos
de mi gran calavera.*

The taste of the bones
of my big skull.

The children tell him to learn from the nursery rhyme of the 'clear stream':

*Bebe el agua tranquila
de la canción añeja:
Arroyo claro,
fuente serena!*

*Por qué te vas tan lejos
de la plazuela?*

Drink the tranquil water
of the mellow song:
clear stream,
serene source!

Why do you stray so far
from our little square?

In the end, the poet, his heart alight, tells the children that he will go far away, beyond the mountains and seas,

to ask our Lord Jesus Christ
to give me back
my child's soul of yore,
ripe with legends,
and my cap with the feather
and my wooden sword.

An echo answers from Lorca's last obscure poems: 'What the
eyes seek in the forehead is a hard landscape of bones . . .'

As I lose myself in the hearts of some children
many times I have lost myself in the sea. . .
Ignoring the water, I am seeking
a death of light which could consume me.

There was only one period in Lorca's life when death, his own intimate enemy, took on a collective shape in his eyes. Shortly after the stupendous success of his *Romancero Gitano* in Spain, he fled from his private life and, I imagine, from the independent, impersonal life his own creation had assumed, leaving him shorn and bereaved of his personal public. Lorca went to New York. He did not know English, and he did not learn it. The mechanized jungle frightened and threatened him in his poise. Life as he understood it, in his own very sheltered existence as in the individual struggle of his Andalusians, was not possible. He could not feel the emotions of the individuals he met, but he felt the impact of the multitudes, their cheap joys, their sweat, their greed and their suffering. He smelt corruption and death—the Apocalypse. And Lorca tried to give shape to these sensations in a series of poems called *El Poeta en Nueva York*, 'The Poet in New York', recently edited by José Bergamín, and published by Bergamín's firm, Editorial Séneca, in Mexico.

It is an unsuccessful attempt to use the pattern of non-Spanish surrealism to express the poet's crushing repugnance and horror. Lorca had to find a medium through which he might be able to visualize this hostile civilization. He did not find it and used a counterfeit; as he had given shape to his Spanish world through the gypsies, a minority set apart and yet part of Spain, with its own but ultra-Spanish symbolism and folklore, he tried to convert the negroes and their conventionalized jazz rhythms into a vehicle for his emotion. But no clear shape emerges; either the poet was unable to transmit it or I fail to react to it. There is a visionary hysteria in these odes which is not without force. But while in Lorca's other poems, with their Spanish associations apparently fantastic and inscrutable metaphors are always condensations or foreshortenings of clear-cut, concrete visions, emotions and traditions, his New York poems seem to hide only one overwhelming vision under their thicket of disjointed words and half-formed images: that of avenging death which would destroy the cruel, lifeless, killing city.

When Lorca returned to Spain he did not go back to his gypsy world. This way of visualization and intensification was closed. From then onwards he wrestled with death on a different level in his art. It is as though the confrontation with mass life, mass misery, mass death had made him both more personal and more

impersonal, and certainly more profoundly sad: his poems became more personal and introspective, his dramatic work more impersonal and searching. The 'edge of the silver sickle' had touched his tragedy.

The shadow deepened when the first upward surge of the new Republic had subsided. There was death in the air then. 1934 was the year of the rising of the Asturian miners. Lorca may have turned away from the harassing political life but he could not but feel the currents of violence and desperate hope.

He put his own hopeless, despairing love for life and his hopeless but by now fearless struggle against the idea of death into the *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*. And this poem became the quintessence of the Spanish 'tragic sense of life', with roots in the deepest tradition of Spanish poetry.

Ignacio Sánchez Mejías was an Andalusian bullfighter who, after retiring from his profession a wealthy man, returned to the bull-ring when he was already mature. He had confidence, rightly, in his experience and courage, though he lacked the perfect physical fitness of youth. But he wanted to escape the grey death 'in the blanket' and to conquer death by dying proudly, gallantly. After a few months of successful 'come-back' a bull killed him in the ring. He had been an intimate friend of Lorca's, a primitive man of straight and impeccable shape, mentally and physically, and his death hit the poet in his inmost being.

The first part of the *Llanto* expresses nothing but the obsession with the fact of the goring and death, *a las cinco de la tarde*, 'at five in the afternoon'. Like monotonous hammer blows, these words recur after every line:

A boy brought the white sheet
at five in the afternoon,

A pail of lime, prepared and ready,
at five in the afternoon,

All else was death and only death
at five in the afternoon. . . .

When the sweat like snow broke out
at five in the afternoon,

When the bull-ring was splashed with iodine
at five in the afternoon,

Death hatched her eggs in the wound,
 at five in the afternoon,
 at five in the afternoon,
 at five sharp in the afternoon. . . .

There is a kind of voluptuous insistence on all macabre details, on 'gangrene approaching', on 'greenish groins', as though the poet wanted to see the destruction so close that he would lose sight of the dead friend.

The second part is visionary, packed with symbols taken from the life of the bullfighter. The poet does not want to see the blood in the sand; he imagines Ignacio in a dream world, a dream bull-ring, trying to recapture his lost youth and finding his blood flowing from him—this spilt blood which the surviving friend does not want to see and cannot forget.

Que no quiero verla!

*Dile a la luna que venga,
 que no quiero ver la sangre
 de Ignacio sobre la arena.*

Que no quiero verla!

*Por las gradas sube Ignacio
 con toda su muerte a cuestras.
 Buscaba el amanecer
 y el amanecer no era.
 Busca su perfil seguro,
 y el sueño le desorienta.
 Buscaba su hermoso cuerpo
 y encontró su sangre abierta . . .*

*No se cerraron sus ojos
 cuando vió los cuernos cerca,
 pero las madres terribles
 levantaron la cabeza . . .*

*Pero ya duerme sin fin.
 Ya los musgos y la hierba
 abren con dedos seguros
 la flor de su calavera. . . .*

I don't want to see it!

Tell the moon to come
for I don't want to see the blood
of Ignacio on the sand.

I don't want to see it!

Ignacio mounts the tiers
with his whole death on his shoulders.
He sought for the morning dawn,
and there was no morning.
He seeks for his own firm profile,
and dreams bewilder him.
He sought for his beautiful body,
and found his blood flowing . . .

. . . His eyes did not close
when he saw the horns loom,
but the terrible mothers
lifted their heads . . .

. . . Yet already he sleeps without end,
already the moss and the grasses
open with unerring fingers
the flower of his skull . . .

Federico, the poet, saw his strong friend battling against the laws of life, fighting to reconquer 'his own firm profile', the effortless poise of youth. But the fight went against him, even though his life had been courageous, gentle and limpid, his head a golden glow of 'Andalusian Rome', his hands soft with the wheat-ears and the dew, his muscles hard when he spurred his horse. There was the eternal ending: the 'ordeal by grass', the slow corruption which the poet hates to remember, though its vision was printed on his brain when he was young.

But then the body is on the marble slab, and the poet tries to comprehend what it means, he tries to think out the mystery of death to which he knows no solution.

*Ya está sobre la piedra Ignacio el bien nacido.
Ya se acabó; qué pasa? Contemplad su figura:
la muerte le ha cubierto de pálidos azufres
y le ha puesto cabeza de oscuro minotauro. . . .*

*Qué dicen? Un silencio con hedores reposa.
 Estamos con un cuerpo presente que se esfuma,
 con una forma clara que tuvo ruiseñores
 y la vemos llenarse de agujeros sin fondo. . . .*

*Yo quiero ver aquí los hombres de voz dura.
 Los que doman caballos y dominan los ríos,
 los hombres que les suena el esqueleto y cantan
 con una boca llena de sol y pedernales.*

*Aquí quiero yo verlos. Delante de la piedra.
 Delante de este cuerpo con las riendas quebradas.
 Yo quiero que me enseñen donde está la salida
 para este capitán atado por la muerte. . . .*

*No quiero que le tapen la cara con pañuelos
 para que se acostumbre con la muerte que lleva.
 Vete, Ignacio. No sientas el caliente bramido.
 Duerme, vuela, reposa: También se muere el mar!*

Now, Ignacio the well-born lies on the stone.
 Now it is finished. What is it? Look on his face:
 death has covered it with pallid bronze
 and given him the head of a dark minotaur. . . .

What is it they are saying? The silence is heavy with stench.
 We are with a solid body growing blurred,
 a clear shape which once had nightingales,
 and we see it pitted with bottomless holes. . . .

I want to see here the men with hard voices,
 those who break horses and harness the rivers,
 the men whose skeleton crunches, who sing
 with a mouth full of sun and of flint stone.

Here I want to see them. Before this stone.
 Before this body with shattered reins.
 I want them to show me where there is a way out
 for this captain fettered by death. . . .

I don't want them to cover his face with their handkerchiefs
 that he should get used to the death he carries.
 Go, Ignacio. Do not heed the hot bellow.
 Sleep, fly, rest. Even the sea dies.

What is it that happens, asks the poet. Nobody can show the way out, the solution, not even the strongest, those whose bodies are drenched with sunlight and whose teeth are like flint. There is no consolation for the man who died, undaunted but defeated, and there is no argument his friend can accept but that this is the tremendous fate of everything alive: even the sea dies.

The last part of the poem recognizes the victory of death and Ignacio's victory over death. It lifts up the courage of the living by showing them what they can do: face death, remember the dead, carry on the chain of life, doomed, but conquerors.

*No te conoce el toro ni la higuera,
ni caballos ni hormigas de tu casa.
No te conoce el niño ni la tarde
porque te has muerto para siempre. . . .*

*Porque te has muerto para siempre,
como todos los muertos de la Tierra,
como todos los muertos que se olvidan
en un montón de perros apagados.*

*No te conoce nadie. No. Pero yo te canto.
Yo canto para luego tu perfil y tu gracia,
La madurez insigne de tu conocimiento.
Tu apetencia de muerte y el gusto de tu boca.
La tristeza que tuvo tu valiente alegría . . .*

Neither the bull nor the fig-tree know you any more,
nor the horses nor the ants in your house.
Neither the child nor the evening know you any more,
because you have died for ever. . . .

Because you have died for ever,
like all the dead of the Earth,
like all the dead who are forgotten
in a heap of muted dogs.

Nobody knows you any more. No. But I sing you.
I sing for later times your profile and your charm.
The noble maturity of your wisdom.
Your hunger for death and the savour of your mouth.
The sadness in your valiant gaiety.

A year later, the sadness in Federico's own valiant gaiety was fulfilled. We know no detail of his assassination, except that

it happened at daybreak. But how could his life-long fight against death have ended otherwise than in his dying without fear?

★ ★ ★ ★

It must be obvious that Lorca's death-defying poetry has a very deep effect on his Spanish readers, an effect produced not by the words but by the associations they carry. Those words speak of the sadness and terror of death. But since all Spaniards, more or less clearly, but always consciously, possess their own philosophy of death, Lorca's courage in facing the issue without any softening veil provokes a clarifying reaction in their minds: it spurs them to dominate death, to be greater than death itself. It tells them that, with or without a future life, with or without a Supreme Judge, with or without the physical horrors of death, it is possible for a man to die so that he kills his own death. And thus Lorca tells them that they may live a clean and upright life, not cringing before death, yet not forgetting it.

It seems to me that here lies the hidden reason, or at least one of the main reasons, for the sudden strong repercussion of Lorca's poetry on British intellectuals.

Certainly he was made a hero of anti-fascist propaganda, and this—or rather, his death—opened the minds of many to his work. Certainly his (much misunderstood) imagery, the music of his verses, his emotional lyricism, impressed those who read Spanish or saw the few translations published until now, because they seemed to find in them a creative level where old forms and new associations were welded into one. Certainly he represented in contrast to the poets of the brain, of the 'thirties in England, the poetry of what we call *las entrañas del alma*—which means the heart and the entrails.

But I think that there is this other reason as well. During the years from the beginning of the Spanish War until now, people in England felt the rising tide of war. War means death. But their whole civilization had denied this violent kind of death which could not be glossed over. Their whole upbringing made it impossible for them to contemplate death other than as the final incident of which it is not done to talk too much. The defence held, but more and more cracks appeared in the dam. When we had to fight our war, it was still possible for a war correspondent

to avoid gruesome stories about mangled bodies 'because people don't want to read about such things at their breakfast table'. But the haze of blood drifted over the Continent, and those who could not help sensing it, the poets and the genuine intellectuals, had to prepare for the inevitable test. How could they face those hideous visions without being 'morbid'?

They face them, and they are facing them in their own way. Yet Federico Garcia Lorca—the Spaniard who had summoned all the traditions, all the tragedy of his people and all the suffering of his own life to face, fight and overcome death, and who had survived so victoriously—may have carried his message to those English intellectuals who are now fighting with their gloves off their own fight against death and for life.

END

(Translated by Ilsa Barea)

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